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Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Bluestar--blue-gray she-cat, tinged with silver around her muzzle.

Deputy: Tigerclaw--big dark brown tabby tom with unusually long front claws.

Medicine Cat: Yellowfang--old dark gray she-cat with a broad, flattened face.

Apprentice, Waterpaw

Warriors: (toms, and she-cats without kits)

Whitestorm --big white tom.

Apprentice, Sandpaw

Darkstripe --sleek black-and-gray tabby tom.

Apprentice, Dustpaw

Longtail--pale tabby tom with dark black stripes

Apprentice, Swiftpaw

Runningwind--swift tabby tom.

Willowpelt--very pale gray she-cat with unusual blue eyes.

Mousefur--small dusky brown she-cat.

Graystripe--long-haired solid gray tom.

Apprentice, Brackenpaw

Fireheart--handsome ginger tom.

Apprentice, Cinderpaw

Apprentices: (more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)

Dustpaw--dark brown tabby tom.

Sandpaw--pale ginger she-cat.

Waterpaw--pretty long-haired calico she-cat with amber eyes, medicine cat apprentice

Cinderpaw--dark gray she-cat

Brackenpaw--golden brown tabby tom

Swiftpaw--black-and-white tom

Queens: (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)

Frostfur--beautiful white coat and blue eyes.

Brindleface--pretty tabby.

Goldenflower--pale ginger coat.

Speckletail--pale tabby, and the oldest nursery queen.

Elders: (former warriors and queens, now retired)

Halftail--big dark brown tabby tom with part of his tail missing.

Smallear--gray tom with very small ears. The oldest tom in ThunderClan.

Patchpelt--small black-and-white tom.

One-eye--pale gray she-cat, the oldest cat in ThunderClan. Virtually blind and deaf.

Dappletail--once-pretty tortoiseshell she-cat with a lovely dappled coat.

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Nightpelt--old black tom

Deputy: Cinderfur--think gray tom

Medicine Cat: Runningnose--small gray-and-white tom

Warriors: Clawface--battle-scarred brown tom.

Littlecloud-- small tabby tom with piercing blue eyes

Wetfoot - gray tabby tom

A*pprentice,* Oakpaw

Stumpytail - brown tabby tom.

Apprentice, Brownpaw

Queens: Dawncloud--small tabby

Darkflower--black she-cat

Tallpoppy--long-legged light brown tabby she-cat.

Newtspeck - is a small black-and-ginger tabby she-cat.

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Crookedstar—a huge light-colored tabby with a twisted jaw.

Deputy: Leopardfur—unusually spotted golden tabby she-cat.

Medicine cat: Mudfur—long-haired light brown tom.

Warriors: Blackclaw—smoky black tom.

Apprentice, Heavypaw

Stonefur—a gray tom with battle-scarred ears.

Apprentice, Shadepaw

Loudbelly—a dark brown tom.

Apprentice, Silverpaw

Silverstream—a pretty slender silver tabby.

Whiteclaw—a dark warrior.

WINDCLAN

Leader: Tallstar--a black-and-white tom with a very long tail.

Deputy: Deadfoot--a black tom with a twisted foot

Medicine Cat: Barkface--a short-tailed brown tom.

Warriors: Mudclaw--a mottled dark brown tom

Apprentice, Webpaw

Tornear--a tabby tom

Apprentice, Runningpaw

Onewhisker--a young brown tabby tom

Apprentice, Whitepaw

Queens: Ashfoot-- a gray she-cat

Morningflower--dilute tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Smudge—plump, friendly black-and-white kitten who lives in a house at the edge of the forest.

Barley—black-and-white tom who lives on a farm close to the forest.

Brokenstar—long-haired dark brown tabby, formerly ShadowClan leader.

Blackfoot—large white tom with huge jet-black paws, formerly ShadowClan deputy.

Clawface—battled-scarred brown tom.

Boulder—silver tabby tom.

Ravenpaw—sleek black cat with a white-tipped tail.

Princess—a light brown tabby with a distinctive white chest and paws—a kittypet.

Cloudkit—Princess's firstborn kit; a long-haired white tom.

Prologue

Spottedleaf opened her eyes, shocked to see long blades of grass and the smell of pine and prey everywhere. *It was just leaf-bare—am I in StarClan?* She scrambled to her paws, noticing her wounds had healed and only a scar was shown across her throat. She must be in StarClan. Below her, a large pool sat in a clearing surrounded by trees and bushes. She opened her jaws to taste the air—mice, squirrel, vole, birds—she could smell it all. She licked her lips, then peered down at the pool where several cats laid. Stars shimmered across their pelts.

"Spottedleaf," meowed a familiar voice beside her.

"Featherwhisker," she greeted him, touching her nose to his flank.

The silver tom placed his plumbing tail over her back. Her legs trembled as stars glimmered through her pelt, now matching the cats below her. "I have come to bring you home."

Spottedleaf widened her eyes. Home? So she was dead. She was to leave ThunderClan—her apprentice, Waterpaw, and Firepaw—all out there on their own. She remembered the flame-colored tom's bright green eyes looking back at her as he asked for herbs. She couldn't see him. Only in his dreams could she walk in now. Accepting his words, she followed him down to the pool where multiple cats where looking up at her, their starry eyes filled with compassion.

Featherwhisker stopped at the edge of the pool, the others all circled around, sat down and bowed their heads. Spottedleaf peered off the side—seeing her lifeless body and Waterpaw standing over it, wailing like a lost kit—yet no one seemed to hear her. Her screams were silent. Spottedleaf looked closer, feeling a huge pang of guilt pulse through her body. "Waterpaw," she mewed.

"I know," a speckled gray tom with blue eyes padded next to her, his pelt slightly faded in color, "but she will grow to be a great

medicine cat," Spottedleaf took a deep breath—they were right. Even Spottedleaf couldn't deny Waterpaw's thirst for knowledge—when it came to the herbs, she could sniff them out like a hound on a trail. "She'll be just fine," he added with a purr.

But it still pained her to see her apprentice laying there helplessly. "Can I at least tell her I'm here?"

"In time." It was a dark tortoiseshell tom who replied. Spottedleaf whipped her around, recognizing the voice of her brother—her littermate who she had played with and became apprentices with side-by-side. She rumbled out a purr from her throat and she immedately rubbed her cheek with his.

"Redtail," she exclaimed, "I'm so glad to see you. You were gone too soon."

"Tigerclaw is to blame," he growled, bristling his neck fur.

Spottedleaf was surprised to hear such news. "Tigerclaw?" she repeated his words, not hiding her shock, "I thought Oakheart did."

Redtail sat down and wrapped his tail over his front paws, now more relaxed, "Tigerclaw will do anything for power. When we were in Sunningrocks, Oakheart was there, and he got toppled over by a rock-fall. Tigerclaw then faced me. I wasn't expecting it, but he breathed in the words, 'Now is it time to repay your debt.' What do you think that meant?"

Spottedleaf shrugged and shook her head slowly, "don't know."

Redtail shook his head as if to clear it, then leaned in closer to his sister, "Firepaw must know what is to come."

"Firepaw?" she repeated. She looked at him, shocked on why he would even mention the flame-colored tom.

"Yes, we think he might be the key to saving the Clans."

"He's an apprentice. Can he really do it himself?" He had only joined the Clans a few moons ago. He couldn't be ready to take on such a large task. Besides, how could he go up against Tigerclaw if he

killed her brother. He was already a skilled warrior. He was a deputy for Bluestar for many moons. She wanted to see him as leader one day. But Firepaw, being the only one who could beat Tigerclaw—it just didn't seem possible.

"It's all we know. You have to speak with him, Spottedleaf. He'll listen to you."

"Won't he listen to others?" She stiffened, suddenly aware of her heart pounding.

"You're a medicine cat," he explained, though he was confused on why he had to remind her. "You can share dreams with him," he added.

Spottedleaf sat by the pool, watching as the night passed and turned to dawn. She watched as Firepaw and Graypaw became Fireheart and Graystripe. She watched as the elders and queen burried her body. She watched Waterpaw helplessly lay in her nest with grief. Once dawn arrived, Fireheart finally went to the warriors' den to sleep. He curled up into a new nest, beside his best friend, Graystripe, and drifted off to sleep.

Spottedleaf quickly padded up to him, quickly pushing away the past—she had to tell him of what is to come. Not about the past. She greeted him with a purr, "Welcome, Fireheart."

"Spottedleaf, I'm so glad to see you," he meowed, matching her purr as he spoke, "I thought I lost you,"

"I'll always be here in your dreams," she replied, closing her eyes and pressing her forehead against his. "There's something you must know," she meowed not able to wait any longer.

Fireheart's green eyes blinked at her nervously, "What is it?"

"Fire alone is to save the Clans,"

Fireheart tilted his head, clearly confused by her words, "What do you mean?"

She couldn't tell him anything more. "That's all I know," she told

him, "that's all I can tell you."

Fireheart faded from view, shouting out Spottedleaf's name, "Spottedleaf wait!" He blinked open his eyes, still groggy from his dream, and looked around to see Graystripe still sleeping peacefully next to him. *If fire is to save the Clans—maybe it means we'll have to find a new home.*

"

Chapter One

Waterpaw stretched out her limbs and yawned. She didn't expect to get such a good night's rest. Looking up, dawn had already passed. It was sun high. She scrambled to her feet, noticing even Yellowfang was gone. Where did she go? She padded to the entrance and found the camp rather busy with warriors. The fresh-kill pile was piled with prey, and most of the snow had gone. Fireheart and Graystripe, the two new warriors, were in the warriors den sleeping. Brokenstar, now called Brokentail, was nestled in the back of the medicine den on the opposite side of Yellowfang's nest. She must have had one eye open on him all night, though she doubted he would have escaped. He was blinded and could barely walk.

"Waterpaw, you're up." rasped Yellowfang, "could you help me get this together?"

Waterpaw shook her head slowly, "No," she mewed almost too softly for Yellowfang to hear, "no, I can't."

"You can't?" Yellowfang repeated, as if she didn't know what Waterpaw refering to.

Waterpaw couldn't believe it. Did she forget what had just happened. Did she forget about Spottedleaf, and how Clawface had killed her and stole their kits? Waterpaw couldn't hold in her thoughts any longer, "It's too soon." she wailed, then ran out of the medicine den and she srambled up the rocky sides. Now sitting on top of the den, she wrapped her plumbing, white tail over her front paws and sighed. Yellowfang didn't come after her, and she was relieved. Waterpaw wanted to be left alone. Without Spottedleaf, she felt like apart of her was missing—even if Yellowfang was only trying to help.

She couldn't shake out the image from her head. The scarred-faced, brown tom who had slashed his mentor's throat, then left her bleeding out. Waterpaw shook her head to clear it, "No," she whispered to herself, "I need to stop thinking about it." she told

herself quietly. But even she knew she was lying to herself. She leaped further up the ravine and headed out the gorse tunnel, thankful not one warrior stopped her.

She needed somewhere to think—somewhere quiet. She padded to the oak trees, near Sunningrocks. She could at think over there. Not even a ShadowClan cat would bother her. RiverClan surely wouldn't turn away a medicine cat apprentice. She trekked faster down a small hill and stopped when she was surrounded by heather and ferns which were still wilted over.

The sun beamed down on her pelt, warming the air, and thinning any ice that still clung to the bark of trees and frills of grass. The water ahead lay still. It was quiet—almost too quiet. Waterpaw stepped carefully out of the heather, looking around and making sure no one else was spying on her. Not that she was sneaking around—she just didn't want to be found or spoken to. If she was aked too many questions by a RiverClan cat, she might accidentally spill out all their secrets. RiverClan doesn't need to know they've lost their medicine cat. Not yet.

She stopped at the edge of the river, looking down at her reflection, then lowered her head to take a drink. She closed her eyes, enjoying the fresh taste of water. It would freeze over the next moon, leaf-bare is here after all—though it was warm today, it could snow at any moment. Surely it wasn't done with them already.

"Waterpaw is that you?" meowed a familair voice from across the river.

Waterpaw looked up, jolting from the sudden sound. She hadn't heard or smelled anyone come up. "Oh, hi, Mistypaw." she mewed, gulping the last bit of water she had in her mouth. "Sorry, I was just getting a drink." she quickly explained.

Mistypaw shot her a confused glance, as if she was questioning if she was allowed to drink the water or not. "Echomist, my mentor, is giving me my assessment today," she gloated, ignoring her comment.

"Mistypaw," a pale gray she-cat padded up to her. Her fur was long

and glossy, and shimmered in the sunlight as she made her way closer to the river, "stop talking and get back to your assessment." she ordered, twitching her tail angrily.

"Good luck," Waterpaw purred, then bounded back into the heathers and srambled down to the forest. She stopped just before the gorse tunnel, looking over her shoulder. *Thank goodness she didn't stay for long*. She thought to herself. *Holding back was harder than I thought*. She ducked into the tunnel, her thick fur brushing up against the green-furled leaves. She padded down the ravine and back into camp, with her tail dragging behind her.

Yellowfang greeted her from the medicine den, her eyes narrowed, but filled with worry. "Waterpaw, thank goodness. I didn't know where you'd been. I thought maybe...where did you go? You have moss all over your fur." she rasped, shaking her head as if to clear it, then looked up her and down.

Waterpaw had barely noticed the moss clinging to her legs and shoulder. She couldn't even remember picking it up, or where she had picked it up from. "I just need to get out. I went down by Sunningrocks to get some water." she explained.

"We have—"Yellowfang paused, realizing questioning her wasn't important. "Did you at least bring some herbs?" Though she already knew the answer, seeing Waterpaw empty-pawed.

"N-no." she stammered, "I didn't know we needed any more herbs," she glanced down at the piles Yellowfang was making. They weren't neat at all like Spottedleaf would have had them.

"Never mind," the gray she-cat rasped, "Did you get any sleep last night?" If she was too distracted to get any herbs, surely she would be to sort them. Yellowfang didn't have the patience for it.

Waterpaw shook her head slowly, "Yes, but I could use more." she admitted, her eyes almost drooping. Yellowfang silently went back to chewing off the ends of the daisy stems, and tossing them to the side of her, not caring where they landed. Waterpaw wrinkled her nose. Didn't she care about this kind of stuff? She brushed past Yellowfang and circled around in her nest. It was damp, but still

fresh. She tucked in her paws, and covered her nose with her tail, drifting off to sleep, as her eyes closed in a matter of seconds.

Chapter Two

Bluestar halted on the edge of the clearing with her Clan lined up beside her. Some of the cats from RiverClan, ShadowClan, and WindClan turned and acknowledged their arrival. Waterpaw trekked toward the rest of the medicine cats. They were sitting on the far end of the clearing. She sat down beside Mudfur, the dark brown tom-on the other side of him, a gray-and-white spotted tom, which Waterpaw guessed to be Runningnose. His nose was streaming with green mucus and crusted near the top.

"We were just telling the story of Thunder, Shadow, River and Wind." rasped Runningnose with a sniffle.

Mudfur dipped his head and continued on with the story, "From high up in the mountains, lay a tribe of four cats, Thunder, River, Wind and Shadow. Each possessed a special skill-Thunder, agile-Wind, speed-River, swimming-Shadow, stealth-but when they traveled together from the mountains..."

He was cut off from the sudden break of silence as the four leaders stepped forward and yowled for the meeting to begin. Waterpaw tucked her tail closer in, wrapping it tightly around her paws.

Bluestar was crouched on her haunges next to Tallstar, who was sitting back on his haunches. Crookedstar sat with his head and tail held high, while a darker tom, Waterpaw remembered to be Nightpelt, sat at the edge. Was he their new leader already?

"Let the Gathering begin," yowled Tallstar. He stepped forward, his legs and tail were tall. He towered over the others in height, but he was lean and agile-despite his old age. His paws were huge, and he rounded his yellow eyes as he continued, "It's good to be back in the moorland." he paused, looking around at the crowd of cats, "Leaf-bare has been fruitful so far, and I've been grateful to StarClan, but we all know it won't last."

The black-and-white tom dipped his head to the next leader, and

took a step back, letting the older tom make his way through. His voice was raspy and cracked with old age, "I am Nightpelt. The new leader of ShadowClan." he began.

Murmurs and whispers broke out amongst the cats, some of them loud enough to hear across the island, "What happened to Brokenstar?" meowed one.

"If he's leader, why doesn't he have his nine lives?" asked another.

Nightpelt lashed his tail. "Silence," he growled, "I will be going to the Moonstone to get my nine lives tomorrow, and when I come back, I *will* be Nightstar." he added cooly. "We have driven out Brokenstar, and Runningnose, has chosen me as their new leader." Waterpaw twitched her tail angrily. *Hmph. No mention of ThunderClan helping*. She scoffted to herself.

Crookedstar's jaws slightly parted open, "Brokenstar had once hunted in our territory, and since he is no longer leader, the river and prey are ours." he meowed hoarsely.

"We still have many mouths to feed." retorted Nightpelt, his fur bristling.

"Enough," hissed Bluestar, stepping in between the two toms who were now snarling at one another. "Nightpelt, hasn't there been enough bloodshed? Your warriors can't fight and need time to heal."

Nightpelt shot her an annoyed glance, but flattened his fur, "fine," he growled.

"With leaf-bare already here and the first snow-fall, we are lucky to have our prey running this well." Bluestar meowed, taking her turn to speak. "And we have two new warriors," she went on, "Fireheart and Graystripe."

The two newly appointed warriors exchanged glances with one another then dipped their heads as the cats around them began to call out their names, though there was still some hesitation in their voices. "Fireheart, Graystripe!" Bluestar gazed over the crowd, stopping on the flat-faced she-cat. "And we have a new medicine

cat, Yellowfang."

Shocked murmurs spread throughout the clearing like a wildfire, but no one dared to question her loyalty. Yellowfang gulped, suddenly noticing all eyes turned to face her. She quickly pushed them away as she dipped her head, feeling a bit of pride-knowing she had chosen the right Clan.

With the Gathering now adjourned, Waterpaw followed her mentor back up the steep hill, with Fireheart, and Graystripe a few tail-lengths ahead. She trotted faster, catching up with them rather quickly. "Fireheart, Graystripe," she whispered, careful to make sure no one else was within ear shot. "Can we talk?"

Fireheart turned to face, his green eyes round with curiosity, but it was Graystripe who replied, "What for?" He turned his head, looking over his shoulder.

"It's about Tigerclaw," she explained, hoping she didn't accidentally say his name too loud. If Tigerclaw knew what she was planning, she'd be shredded and made into a crowfood.

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Waterpaw waited up at the rock formation just behind the medicine den. It was the only place they could talk undected. Yellowfang was a light sleeper, though she knew she could escape by just pretending to go make dirt. She got away fairly easily, not even making the old she-cat stir. She sat down, twitching her tail nervously. What would she ask them? She didn't want them thinking she was accusing them of knowing too much. She had seen Tigerclaw speak to them just before heading into the leader's den. She was sure of it. She couldn't have been dreaming, though she was beginning to have her doubts.

The two warriors scrambled up the wall, their claws scratching hard against the flat earth. They greeted Waterpaw with a nod and sat down, both of them weary if they were to get caught. "What's up?" Fireheart wasted no time.

All the cats were asleep except for Longtail, who was on night

patrol; his mouth parted open as if he could smell them. Waterpaw hesitated, careful not to accidentally have him look their way. They were tucked behind a frenzy of fern, patches of grass poked through the thin sheet of snow.

Waterpaw laid down and tucked her pose underneath her chest, "I think Tigerclaw is the one who actually killed Redtail."

Chapter Three

The two warriors exchanged uneasy glances with one another. Fireheart's bright green eyes glistened as he spoke, "You could be right," he shuffled his paws uncomfortably.

"You believe me?" Waterpaw was shocked, her voice a bit higher pitched than she intended. She didn't expect them to believe her. She quickly glanced around making sure Longtail didn't hear her. The pale tabby tom stood far enough to not be within earshot, but if he tried hard enough, he could probably still pick up their whispers. But he sat there, still looking forward and yawned.

"Yes," Fireheart replied, "Ravenpaw said he had seen it."

"But we don't know if he's right." Graystripe butted in.

"But what if he is?" Waterpaw mewed, directing her gaze from Longtail to Graystripe"Would Ravenpaw talk to me if I asked?" she added, curiously. She had wanted to talk to him moons ago, but couldn't ever get the chance. Surely she could get him to sneak out at night for a bit now.

"Most likely." Fireheart nodded.

"But you'll have to make sure Tigerclaw doesn't catch you. He wouldn't like him being too sleepy for training." added Graystripe.

Waterpaw looked over at the apprentice's den as if she was searching for the dark tom in the dead of night. She could only see the soft glow of a pale, sandy she-cat. Ravenpaw was probably further back."Very well. I'll fetch him." She bounded off towards the den, and ducked under the brambles lining the entrance. She crouched, making herself flat as she could, not wanting to wake up anyone else.

"Ravenpaw," she whispered, nudging his flank.

Ravenpaw opened his eyes, and blinked up at her, confused on why the medicine cat apprentice was inside the den. "Wha?" he meowed.

"Shhh," Waterpaw silenced him, placing her tail over his mouth. "Come on," she whispered.

"Why?" he protested quietly, scrambling to his paws, and licked his white-patched chest.

"I have some news about Tigerclaw." she whispered once she ducked out of the brambles once more, shaking off any moss that had stuck to her thick pelt.

Ravenpaw followed close behind as she led the way back up the rocky formation of the medicine den. Fireheart and Graystripe sat next to each other, both tails flicking anxiously. Graystripe kept his head held high, searching around them as he smelled the familiar scents of Waterpaw and their friend, Ravenpaw.

"You're here too?" mewed Ravenpaw as he made his way up, flexing his claws into the rocks to keep himself balanced. His gash he once had when Waterpaw first joined was now almost gone, his fur growing back once again. Waterpaw watched as the scrawny black tom sat down and wrapped his tail over his front paws.

"Tell Waterpaw what you told us about Tigerclaw." urged Fireheart, his orange pelt glimmered in the moonlight as it rose higher in the sky.

"It was just before sunhigh when Tigerclaw and I went out on a patrol," Ravenpaw began, "RiverClan was there near the water's edge, edging us on for a battle for Sunningrocks. Tigerclaw wouldn't leave without at a battle, but Redtail knew they were outnumbered. We had Whitestorm, Longtail, Dustpaw and Mousefur with us, but it wasn't enough." He paused as if trying to remember back to the battle. "Redtail called for us to reatreat. Tigerclaw told me to go back with the rest of them, but I couldn't leave him there. Oakheart was still there trying to pick a fight with Redtail. So I hid behind a bush far enough for him not to see or hear me. Then Oakheart died from a rockfall. It wasn't Redtail's fault, and the two other RiverClan warriors brought his body back to their camp—" He

pulled back his ears, and narrowed his eyes, "Then that's when I saw it happen. That's when Tigerclaw snuck up on Redtail and killed him. And then I ran back to tell you all." he finished, looking back up Waterpaw.

Waterpaw thought for a moment. This was exactly how it was in her vision. Should she trust these three with a vision like this? Ravenpaw was his apprentice after all—would he go and blab her secret to him? She took a deep breath, looking down at her paws as she spoke, "I saw that in a vision," she whispered, "I tried to warn Bluestar, but she didn't want to listen." she confessed.

Fireheart and Graystripe exchanged glances again. Graystripe let out a growl rumble from his throat, "we tried to do the same."

"No wonder why she didn't seem phased by our accusation." Fireheart murmured under his breath. He crouched down, and tucked his paws under his chest. "She just brushed us off saying she didn't have time to speak about more nonesene like that. She said that 'Tigerclaw is a cherished warrior, and now a deputy.'"

"If Tigerclaw ever finds out that we know, he could—" Ravenpaw gulped, not able to finish his words.

"We can help you leave," Fireheart offered, "there's a farm, where Barley lives. We could take you there and you can live with him."

"But how would you explain why I'm gone?" Ravenpaw protested, though he did seem to like the idea.

Fireheart laid there in thought, while Waterpaw sat up and widened her eyes, "Shh," she hissed, "we should get going back to our nests. Longtail might have sensed us." she warned softly, brushing past the two warriors and down into the medicine den. Yellowfang stirred, turning the other way, her eyes still tightly closed. Waterpaw quickly tucked her paws into Spottedleaf's nest, and peered outside into the clearing, watching as Fireheart and Graystripe made their way to the warriors den undected. Ravenpaw scurries past them, his dark pelt an advantage in the night sky, then ducked into the apprentice den.

Longtail was still up the ravine, his head up and mouth open, tasting the air. *Had he detected us after all*? Waterpaw thought, quickly resting her head down, but still kept her eyes open to watch him. The pale tabby tom got to his paws and glanced around the clearing, and padded to the spot where they were talking. Waterpaw held her breath, turning her ears a notch to listen for his footsteps. Surely he knew they were there now. She heard some small rocks fall above, then Longtail scurried back to his post, sitting down, looking out into the horizon.

Whew. She closed her eyes, relieved the tom didn't seem to dwell on what he smelled there. *He must have just scented ThunderClan*. Waterpaw told herself. But her thoughts were quickly replaced by the thought of Ravenpaw leaving the Clans. Would he even happy leaving the Clan life? Surely Tigerclaw would want to see his apprentice and bury him. How does Fireheart plan to pull it off?

Chapter Four

Waterpaw ducked into the elders' den, herbs locked in her jaws. Patchpelt and Smallear were fast asleep and snoring loudly. Dappletail, One-eye and Halftail, laid awake, blinking groggily at the ginger and brown patched she-cat. They were better enough to be back in their den, but One-eye's one good eye was still streaming. "I have some chickweed," Waterpaw mewed, placing the tiny, green leaves in front of One-eye, "it'll help your streaming eyes." she explained.

One-eye lapped up the herbs, though she was reluctant to finish the rest. "Save the rest for a younger cat." she rasped, coughing as she finished.

"Nonsense." mewed Waterpaw, pushing the herb closer with her paw. "I can always get more."

"Not during leaf-bare," she protested.

Waterpaw had admired her knowledge. She was right about the herbs—most of them were frosted over and they were running low in the herb store. It's been almost a moon since she had spoken with Fireheart, Graystripe and Ravenpaw. They still had to figure out how to get him out here before Tigerclaw figured out what they all knew. It was bound to happen by often they were meeting. Even Yellowfang had seemed suspicious about her sneaking out at night.

"We have plenty," she lied.

One-eye lapped up the rest, then closed her eyes. "Thank you, Waterpaw." she purred.

"Can you get some tansy for her?" rasped, Half-tail, "she's been coughing and keeping most us awake." he added with a slight hiss of annoyance.

Waterpaw nodded her head, "of course." Then she ducked back

under the brambles and into the medicine den where Yellowfang was counting out the feverfew they had left. She padded around her and carefully grabbed the bitter herb, alongside some heather nectar to hopefully soften the taste. Once she got back, Patchpelt, and Smallear were now awake, sharing tongues.

"It's like I always say," Patchpelt meowed in between licks, "it's good for you."

"Yeah, it's only good if you—" Smallear looked up at Waterpaw, his tongue still sticking out, "Oh, Waterpaw. It's good that you're here."

Waterpaw dropped the herbs in front of One-eye, whose eye was now almost closed tight. "Hear eat these," she urged, then glanced up at Smallear, though she didn't want another tedious chore to do for them. She enjoyed going to the elder's den to listen to their stories, but they bickered enough like kits and it was enough to drive anyone mad. "Why is that?" she meowed.

"I have a tick on my left shoulder," his voice low and cracked with age."

"Oh, I'll get an apprentice to come and do that for you." Waterpaw knew exactly who to choose too, though she doubted they would be pleased. She couldn't choose Dustpaw or Sandpaw—they were still hostile towards her as if she was still a kittypet first joining the Clan. Swiftpaw was one she could talk to, but she wasn't too sure if he was already out on patrol. She headed into the clearing. Only Runningwind, her previous mentor, and Mousefur were out putting a large chaffinch and a mouse into the fresh-kill pile. Peering over to the apprentices' den, she could see a faint shadow of black-and-white fur making his way out.

Waterpaw padded over to him, his fur bristling as she neared him. She stopped a tail-length away, blinking with confusion, "Are you alright?"

"Longtail says I have to stay in camp today." he hissed. "It's not fair. Dustpaw and Sandpaw get to go out hunting."

Waterpaw was relieved, though she was now the barrier of bad

news. She now felt worried. Would he do what she asked? She was still an apprentice after all—she didn't have her full medicine cat name yet. She drew up the courage to ask him, her heart pounding in her her chest. "Well, Smallear has some ticks." she had hoped it was enough words for him understand what she meant, but his amber eyes only blinked expressionless. "Could you tend to them?"

"Swiftpaw," hissed Longtail as he came out of the fronds of heather and into the clearing. His eyes narrowed, gazing angrily at Waterpaw. "I thought I told you to fetch more moss for the elders."

"H-he is." she stuttered. *Can't he talk to an apprentice*? Waterpaw bit back her words, digging her claws into the ground below her.

"Sorry, I was just asking Waterpaw something." Swiftpaw mewed, clearly not bothered by his mentor's tone.

"Well, don't take too long. When you're finished, I want to take you to the hollow and do some battle training." he growled, bounding off towards the warriors' den and ducked through the sticks outlining the entrance.

"Thanks," he purred. "He isn't so bad once you get to know him. He's a great mentor." Swiftpaw boasted, puffing out his chest. His gray-and-white, patched fur ruffled as the wind picked up. "Not too fond of the task, but I can help out." He gave a chest a quick lick.

"Thank you." Waterpaw mewed. Swiftpaw sprung away up the ravine where they made their dirt. Waterpaw was thankful she didn't have to deal with the mousebile this time around, or hear their bickering. She remembered them fussing over the silliest things when she would return with herbs. Waterpaw padded to the medicine den. The long tendrils of moss hung down lower from the weight of the snow, making Waterpaw have to duck inside.

Yellowfang looked up, her eyes round with exhuastion. "We don't have much herbs left," she croaked. Her eyes shifted back to the empty shelves—only a few herbs now laid on them.

"The frost has killed a lot of it." Waterpaw mewed, hanging her head low. Without the herbs, their Clan could vanish like WindClan

did—but for good. Waterpaw's eyes widened from just the thought of it. "What are we gonna do?" she cried, unintentionally, not knowing if Yellowfang even had an answer. Though from the looks of it, she was just as clueless as her.

"StarClan wouldn't let us die like this," Yellowfang rasped, pulling back her ears. It was as if she was reading Waterpaw's mind. Could she? Blinking the thought the away, she heard her mentor continue, her eyes narrowing, "why don't you go and see if any have been restored. The cold has let up a bit, but I doubt it's finished with us."

Waterpaw felt exhausted from her morning duties already. Now she had to go and trek through the snow looking for herbs? "Do you really think I'll find something?" she muttered.

"You're bound to find something." Yellowfang spat, flicking her tail with annoyance.

Waterpaw let out a grumble and trekked out of the den and out into the mush of snow, which was melting from the morning sun. She liked Yellowfang as her mentor. But her patience was nothing like Spottedleaf. The thought of Spottedleaf clouded her mind as she made her out of the gorse tunnel. "Spottedleaf, guide me."

Chapter Five

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here, beneath the highrock for a Clan meeting." called out Bluestar. Her blue-gray fur shimmering as the sun beamed down at them. Warriors came out from their dens, everyone's eyes gleamed with joy. Longtail and Willowpelt made their way to the front, Sandpaw and Dustpaw sitting behind them. Whitestorm sat at the edge, with Tigerclaw, who was twitching his tail with anticipation as if he was annoyed she called a meeting. Frostfur, and two of her kits bounded out to the clearing almost tumbling over one another.

Waterpaw sat just outside the entrance of the medicine den, her tail wrapped tightly around her paws. More cats came out, filling the camp. Bluestar stepped closer to the edge and looked down at the two kits, both of their eyes wide and eager. "I am about to do one of my favorite ceremonies," Bluestar began, her voice bellowing acorss the camp. "Brackenkit and Cinderkit, please come forward." she beckoned them with her tail. Cinderkit trembled, but proudly made her way to the highrock behind Brackenkit. "Brackenkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be an apprenticed. From this moment on until you recieve your warrior name, you will known as Brackenpaw." She went on, "Graystripe, you have shown great courage and loyalty. You are ready for an apprentice."

Graystripe bounded over to her and touched noses, his fur bristling with excitement. "Cinderkit," Bluestar continued, glancing back down at the gray kit. "you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be an apprenticed. From this moment, you will known as Cinderpaw." Her eyes gazed over the crowd then stopped on the flame-colored tom. "Fireheart, you are a strong warrior and you're ready for an apprentice."

Fireheart padded from the same side as Graystripe did, copying him and touched noses with his apprentice. "I will try my hardest." Cinderpaw breathed.

Bluestar leaped down, and Tigerclaw padded to her side, his neck bristling with anger. "Should they be mentors already?" he growled in her ear. They faded from view, but Waterpaw could still hear them in distance.

Bluestar's eyes narrowed. "He has shown great loyatly to the Clan." she hissed.

Waterpaw twitched her ears and leaned a little closer to listen to what he had to say, but to her surprise, she heard nothing. She glanced over the highrock; Tigerclaw peered out from behind the ledge, his fur still bristling. Waterpaw quickly turned around and went back inside the den, hoping the deputy didn't notice her watchful gaze. Yellowfang grumbled to herself, counting the herbs she had collected yesterday. It wasn't much—some bits of borage leaves, stinging nettle, and celandine—but almost completely useless to the Clan if there were to be another battle, or worse, another string of sickness. Her mind ached with the thought of letting her Clan down.

"We don't have much." Yellowfang growled.

"I know. The frost hasn't let up." Waterpaw retorted, "I don't know how much longer this leaf-bare is going to last. But I hope it goes soon. We can't afford another strand of sickness." she confessed.

Yellowfang looked up at her, eyes round with worry, "I'm afraid it's not finished with us yet." she rasped, going back to separating the stems and flower tops. She carelessly chewed off the stems and tossed them to the side with a jerk of her head, and swiped the tops to the left. Her piles weren't neat. Not like Spottedleaf would have kept them. Waterpaw padded over to the other side and began brushing the stems into a pile with her paws. *Yellowfang's like an apprentice at times when it comes to keeping tidy*. Waterpaw thought bitterly to herself.

Once Yellowfang was finished with the celandine, she moved onto the huge borage leaves. She bit off the ends, and put them into a neat pile onto the shelf, lining it with some poppy seeds. The little stems she nipped off clung to her pelt like glue as she spat them out, though it didn't seem to bother her as she kept going with the

next task. ""It's half-moon tonight, remember." Yellowfang rasped, giving her chest a quick lick once she was done.

"We should be leaving soon, then." Waterpaw mewed, looking up. It was nearly sun high, but there was still a chill in the air. Snow was almost gone, but still kept ahold to the ground as if it were to be plucked out from existence. Fireheart and Graystripe had already taken out their apprentices to see the territory. She would be too tired to speak with them when she got back and they'll probably be exhuasted from all the training. When could she talk with them now? She sighed and padded out of the den to get some air—to clear away her thoughts. StarClan couldn't help her with something like this, could they?

She sat down at the entrance, and glanced up at the clouds overhanging the camp. Paw steps sounded just a few tail-lengths away and she looked down to find Darkstripe and Tigerclaw speaking in hushed tones. She sleeked back into the den, but kept her ears angled to listen to what they had to say.

"You know how he's never around anymore. Just before the battle with ShadowClan, I saw him slip out. Surely he's the one who had told them to attack. Did you notice how he wasn't in the battle?" hissed Tigerclaw.

Darkstripe let out a snarl of acceptance, "I did notice that." Waterpaw gasped. Who was it they were talking about? If he was speaking of Fireheart, Waterpaw saw him there—he was fighting a large gray tom. Darkstripe continued, "what should *we* do about it?" he added.

"Get rid of him." growled Tigerclaw. His voice was low, but anger chipped off his tongue.

Waterpaw heard no more, but pawsteps going in opposite directions. She quickly looked back to where Yellowfang was. She was grooming herself now in the back, flicking her paw as she dunked into the small pool. *Get rid of him*. She echoed in her head. *Get rid of who*? She couldn't think of anyone who would betray ThunderClan, except for Tigerclaw himself. He wouldn't talk about himself like that, would he? She widened her eyes, and rose to her

paws. *I know who. But him? Why? He wouldn't do such a thing*. Waterpaw shook her head to clear it. *It couldn't be. It just couldn't be Ravenpaw.*

Chapter Six

"Come on, Waterpaw. I swear, you're slower than a freezing badger." Yellowfang hissed from across the clearing. Her tail twitched angrily, and her eyes were narrowed to slits. It was past the time they were supposed to leave, which means they'll be late. "The moon will not—"

"not wait for us. I know." breathed Waterpaw, brushing past her. She padded up the ravine, leading the way, and ducked out of the gorse tunnel. Yellowfang followed in beside once she made her way out, but left just enough room for them to not brush pelts. It was a long journey to the Moonstone, but they were both used to it by now. Waterpaw had made the journey a few times before, but this was the first time with Yellowfang—a once known ShadowClan medicine cat.

They trekked into the thick forest of trees, the cold gripping onto Waterpaw's shoulders. She shuttered, but kept her pace. Yellowfang fluffed out her fur and shook her head. "Burr. It's cold tonight." she spat, almost going into a run. Waterpaw went into a trot, finding it hard to keep up with her mentor. She was glad she came to a halt when they hit the Great Sycamores, which meant they were close to the thunderpath. She wasn't excited to cross it, but if it meant they were half way there, it made her paws tremble with excitement.

Yellowfang veered off to the left, and trekked alongside a path, leading to the WindClan border. Waterpaw reluctantly followed. Spottedleaf didn't go this way with her before. Was she avoiding ShadowClan for a reason? Yellowfang relaxed and slowed her pace as the wind chill broke once the sun went down.

The half-moon glinted just above the horizon, as they neared WindClan territory. Waterpaw widened her eyes, unease prickling in her pelt. The moors opened beyond what she could see. Reeds poked through bits of the snow, and frost clung to the stems. Yellowfang padded onward, keeping her steady pace; only the crunching of snow could be heard now as Waterpaw trekked after

her, ears pulled back. She looked around, weary-eyed. Sounds from across the lake—Waterpaw has never heard before—came blaring into their ears. Yellowfang and Waterpaw both stopped and gave each other a quick glance of apprehension.

"What was that?" Waterpaw asked, through the darkness of the night, and breaking the silence.

"Horses, no cows," her voice was crisp against the cold, and her tooth snagged against her jaws. "They're usually in their dens at this time. Come on, we should hurry. The others will be worried."

"They sound as if a monster is eating them. Should we run?" Waterpaw could feel her heart about to pound out of her chest.

Yellowfang turned to see Waterpaw sitting down, her nose to the ground, and eyes closed, unable to to move. She let out a mrrow of laughter, "that's how they always sound."

Waterpaw glanced up at her. "I wouldn't want to hear what it did sound like." she retorted, feeling herself suddenly able to breath and walk. She caught up to Yellowfang who was now trotting through the open moors, but avoided any trails leading into WindClan camp. She could just faintly smell WindClan, which made Waterpaw guess Yellowfang was going around where their boundary lies. She trekked alongside the thunderpath, her tail held high.

Waterpaw followed closely behind, staying alert in case any patrols came near, or worse, monsters. Rain sprinkled down onto them, washing away the patches of snow.

"Let's hurry. The rain is getting harder. There's a tunnel just beyond the moors." She swished her tail in the direction of the horizon.

"We can't stop now." Waterpaw protested, but even she had to admit, she didn't want to be in the rain much longer. "We'll be even more late."

"My bones are old. We can afford to stop for at least a few moments."

Yellowfang made her way down a hill and through a tunnel, leading

into pure darkness. I guess this is like heading into Mothermouth. Thought Waterpaw, letting her whiskers guide her through. Yellowfang stopped just a whisker-length from the exit, twitching her tail in annoyance. The light from the moon shown through, making Yellowfang's gray pelt shimmer and sparkle. "We'll stop here until the rain lets up a bit." Yellowfang meowed, peering out from the tunnel.

Waterpaw washed her paw, swiping it over her face, then gave it a flick to get off the moss clinging to her claw. Yellowfang rasped something, but Waterpaw was busy licking her chest and didn't hear her. When Waterpaw looked up, the old gray she-cat was gone. She glanced up to see her yellow eyes staring down at her, "Waterpaw," she hissed.

Waterpaw scambled to her feet, and followed Yellowfang back up the hill from out of the tunnel and she stopped just before the old thunderpath. Waterpaw sighed. "We have to cross?" she asked, already knowing the answer to her own question. She could see Mouthermouth just on the other side. The mountain stood tall in the distance, making Waterpaw suddenly gulp with aniticipation. She felt like it was her first day as a medicine cat apprentice, and she's just coming to the Moonstone for the first time. Gulping again, she headed across the thunderpath, sprinting after Yellowfang. This side of the thunderpath, thankfully was narrower than the side closest to ShadowClan territory. And here, she wouldn't have to worry about running into any ShadowClan warriors, especially running into Littlepaw.

"We're almost there." Yellowfang croaked, then cleared her throat, as she made her way down to the other cats who were sitting by the entrance of the mountain. Waterpaw could clearly see they were close—she had no idea why Yellowfang was telling her.

"You're finally here." Mudfur greeted them with a curt nod.

"We were beginning to think you weren't coming." sniffled Runningnose, his crusted nostrils flaring. Waterpaw still couldn't understand this tom. How could a medicine cat not be able to cure his own sickness? "We should head inside." he rasped again, swiping his tongue over his jaws.

"Do you think the rain will be done when we're back?" whispered Waterpaw in Mudfur's ear just before they followed single-file-line into the long, dark tunnel.

"I sure hope so. These old bones can't take the it much longer. But if it means leaf-bare has come to an end, it's worth it." Mudfur replied, heading into the darkness.

Waterpaw blinked and looked up at silverpelt. Mudfur was right. If the rain washed away the snow, it could mean leaf-bare has finally ended and new-leaf is on its way.

Chapter Seven

Waterpaw closed her eyes, touching her nose to the moonstone. Stars swirled around her and carried her paws to the grounds she knew well. "StarClan," she breathed. Looking around were the familiar forests, scents of prey, in every which way, and a large pool of water where she could see herself, Yellowfang, Mudfur, Barkface and Runningnose laying down, breathing in a deep sleep.

She glanced around, noticing it was rather empty. Where was everyone? She got to her paws and padded further into the forest, keeping her tail high in the air. It was StarClan afterall. Nothing bad could happen here.

"Waterpaw?" meowed a voice. Though Waterpaw didn't recognize it. She turned around, face to face to a grey speckled tom. "I'm Goosefeather. I've heard much about you." he added with a purr, sitting down rather close to her and wrapping his tail over his paws.

Funny, I've never heard of you. She thought bitterly as she held her breath from the stench of his. She sat down, leaning back a bit as she spoke, "I believe you know of the prophecy then?" she wasted no time, but made sure to keep her tone subtle.

"You don't waste any time, do you?"

"I just want some answers."

"We have told you all we know."

"There has to be more you can tell me."

Goosefeather said nothing more. He twitched his tail in annoyance and looked away into the distance. "You'll find out, Waterpaw. You're smarter than you think."

"This tells me nothing." she spat, pulling back her ears. She felt a jab in her side and her name being whispered into her dream. She opened her eyes, back to the darkness of the cave and the cold stone beneath her paws. She scrambled to her paws and followed them back up the tunnel.

"It's good to be back at camp." Waterpaw purred when they finally set foot into the medicine den.

"Yeah," yawned Yellowfang, sitting down and beginning to do the tedious work of counting.

"Since there was rain, there has to be some herbs already sprouting. Can I go check?" Waterpaw asked, about to head back out.

"Shouldn't you rest?" Yellowfang looked up from her counting, "We just made the long journey back. Surely you need to rest at least a bit?"

I'm not as old as you are. She thought to herself. But she did have to admit, she was a bit tired—but she didn't want to be cooped inside the den. She was eager to see what was growing. There could be all kinds of things they need. "I can rest when I get back," she pleaded, stopping mid step.

"Alright."

Without another word, Waterpaw padded out of the den, and first headed up—scrambling above into the rocks. She was going to see if there was any burdock roots and cobwebs. They were bound be at least one of those. She made her into the sandy hollow, just passing by the dawn patrol who veered north of her. She scoped around, keeping her nose to the ground and eyes peeled.

Nothing. Not even a tiny spider trying to find its way to make it's web. She headed back up, where the dawn patrol where going, then came to a stop when she saw the thunderpath a few fox-lenths away. She had enough of monsters. She thought back to her and Yellowfang crossing over thunderpath on their way back to camp. Almost not able to bare it, she closed her eyes.

Yellowfang skidded to a halt in the middle, looking over her shoulder at Waterpaw. Waterpaw sprinted across, though she could feel the ground shake from a monster roaring its way up the hill. She ran faster, passing Yellowfang. She made it to the other side seconds before a huge monster with bright yellow eyes came zooming by—missing her tail by a whisker-length. Panting hard, she suddenly remembered Yellowfang; eyes wide with worry, she frantically looked around for her mentor. Not able to see her, she could only think of the worst. "Yellowfang," she called out, shaking her head to clear it.

"I'm here." the old she-cat grumbled from across the thunderpath.

Sighing with relief, Waterpaw pricked her ears. "Thank StarClan." she purred, greeting Yellowfang as she waded her way over.

A monster sounds in the distance, making Waterpaw jolt back to the present, opening her eyes. She quickly trotted to the nearest tree and waited for the rumbles to die down. She could clearly see the monster with four twolegs—two older ones and the other were kits — sitting in its belly. She shivered at the thought and remembered her trips in there were not favorable.

Once she could no longer smell its awful stench, she padded back down the path, leading to the Great Sycamore tree. Perhaps something would have sprung up there. She passed by the heather and ferns and came to a stop when she saw the twisted branches and trunks around the scyamore. Rocks were scattered around and washed up from the rain, making Waterpaw's pads hurt with every step.

There wasn't much undergrowth here. Looking around, all Waterpaw could see was the bushes, which were full of leaves, and rocks. But this this trip wasn't wasted, turning around, she saw some catmint buds starting to bloom. "Oh thank StarClan." she purred, "This is a good sign."

She blinked hopefully at it, admiring the beauty of the tiny flowers. Catmint blooming this early could mean the other herbs will too. She headed back to camp with her head and tail held high, eager to tell Yellowfang what she found.

"Yellowfang," she meowed, as she made her way to the medicine den entrance. "I wasn't able to bring any..." she paused, realizing Yellowgfang was fast asleep, her sides heaving as she snored loudly.

Waterpaw would have to tell her in the morning. Curling up in Spottedleaf's old nest, she rested her chin on her paws and closed her eyes. Though the moss was old and stale, she still couldn't find herself to change them. She drew in a slow breath, suddenly finding herself wishing Spottedleaf was still here—she would be up, still sorting through herbs. Spottedleaf almost never slept. Waterpaw had to a lot more to learn if she wanted to be anything like her.

Chapter Eight

"Yellowfang, Cinderpaw is badly hurt." yowled Fireheart. He carried a limp, gray body in his jaws, and put her down in front of Yellowfang, who was already scanning her from head to toe.

"What happened?" Yellowfang gasped, seeing Cinderpaw's leg was twisted in a way she's never seen before.

"It was a monster. I think it was a trap." Fireheart explained, not taking his eyes off his apprentice.

"Oh great StarClan, what happened to Cinderpaw?" Waterpaw meowed, eyes wide with horror, herbs still clinging to the side of her jaws. She had just come back from an herb run—she was able to bring back a load this time.

"A monster," Yellowfang meowed before Fireheart could repeat himself.

"A monster did that, how?" Waterpaw couldn't hide her suprise. She didn't know monsters were capable of breaking a leg like this. Did they always let their prey go?

"Waterpaw, we have cobwebs in the back." Yellowfang quickly ordered, flicking her tail with impatience.

Waterpaw bounded to the back of the den, dropping the herbs near the shelves. She swiped her paw over the cobwebs, making sure to wind up a good pawful before breaking it off with her teeth. She brought it back to Yellowfang and let her wrap it around Cinderpaw's broken leg.

"There," rasped Yellowfang once she finished, taking a step back, "all we can do now is wait."

A white queen came wailing inside the medicine den, "Cinderpaw, oh my Cinderpaw. Will she be okay?"

Yellowfang looked up at her. At first she had only sadness in her eyes, but they were soon pushed back once she spoke, "We have done all we can, Frostfur. She'll be fine. She just needs some rest. She's still in shock."

Waterpaw could tell Frostfur wasn't satisfied with the answer Yellowfang gave her, though she didn't say anything otherwise. She turned back and headed for the nursery, ducking inside the tight brambles encircling the entrance. Fireheart was still standing there, unable to fathom what had happened.

"These will help," meowed Waterpaw, handing him a pawful of poppy seeds.

Fireheart looked down and stared at them for what seemed like moons. "This was my fault. I should have been watching her." he finally meowed, now looking down at his paws. He shuffled them with unease.

"Of course it wasn't your fault." Waterpaw reminded him.

"I think it was a trap. I didn't see it in time and she..."

"Fireheart, listen to me. This isn't your fault."

"Fireheart, get some rest. You can visit Cinderpaw tomorrow when she wakes." hissed Yellowfang, swishing her plumbing tail to and fro.

"These will help." Waterpaw urged again, this time putting them onto the ground in front of him. She wasn't going to make him eat them, but if he wanted any sleep at all, this was the only way to calm him down. "Please, we can talk about it more tomorrow." she pleaded, pushing them closer to his paw.

Fireheart ducked down and lapped up the poppy seeds Waterpaw had given him then padded to the warriors' den, keeping his tail dragging behind him. *Why would Fireheart blame himself so hard for an accident like this?* Thought Waterpaw. She shook her head to clear, thinking she probably shouldn't dwell on it. It wasn't her matter to think about.

Turning to Cinderpaw, her body was still lying there, her breath shallow. She could feel a sudden chill run down her spine. What if it kills her? Waterpaw widened her eyes and took a step back, not able to bare the thought any longer.

"What's gotten into you? You look as if you'd seen a fox in our den." Yellowfang glanced around with caution, in case there was really was a fox, but she saw nothing.

"Will she be okay?" Waterpaw asked, flicking her tail, but kept her gaze fixiated on Cinderpaw's infected leg, which now was almost bleeding out from the cobwebs wrapped around.

"I have never seen this before." Yellowfang rasped, shuffling her paws over a bed of moss in the back of the den. "Let's bring her over here, where she can have some water when she wakes."

Yellowfang lifted her by the sruff, while Waterpaw made sure the injured leg wasn't dragging and reopening the wound they had just rebounded. Cinderpaw let out a pityful mew, but she didn't fight the help.

"I'm sorry little one, please get some rest." Yellowfang whispered in her ear as she placed her on the freshly-made nest.

Cinderpaw let out a cough, "I'm not little." she coughed again, barely able to get out the words she wanted to say.

"To me, you're all little." Yellowfang swung her head around and padded to the entrance, beckoning Waterpaw with a flick of her tail.

"You've never seen something like this—"

Waterpaw was cut off by Yellowfang's sharp hiss, "Shh, not here."

She padded outside of the entrance and closer to the highrock, where Bluestar spoke. Waterpaw followed in silence, though she had no idea why they had come all the way out here. Was it Cinderpaw she was worried about overhearing?

Yellowfang sat down and glanced over her shoulder, then back at

Waterpaw. "She won't be able to walk again."

"What?" Waterpaw didn't hide her shock. She was crouched in front of Yellowfang, her amber eyes wide.

"She will heal. But I don't know if it will fully."

Waterpaw could sense she was holding back, but she didn't press her feelings now. "Fireheart already blames himself. He would never forgive himself if she couldn't walk again." she protested, scrambling to her paws.

"Waterpaw, you know as well as I do. This is not something we can fix. Sometimes we need to let StarClan—"

"No!" Waterpaw hissed.

"Waterpaw, please," Yellowfang lifted her haunches, but kept herself calm. "This is in StarClan's paws now. We have done all we can."

"She just got here," Waterpaw was confused. Why was she acting like Cinderpaw's been here for moons? Have they really tried everything in their paws? Surely a broken leg could be healed.

"We don't have anything that will help." Yellowfang narrowed her eyes, becoming impatient with her now.

"We have to try something." Waterpaw wasn't whispering anymore. Her voice carried over the clearing.

Yellowfang's ears pricked up as some glances drifted their way. She gulped then looked down at her apprentice. "I don't know what to —"

"What if I could find a way to cure her?" Waterpaw meowed just barely above a whisper.

"That's quite bold of you to assume." Yellowfang snapped.

"What if I could find a way to cure her?" Waterpaw repeated herself with more force this time.

Chapter Nine

"And how do you suppose you're going to do that?" Yellowfang's words were a little more than a mrrmrr.

Waterpaw shifted her paws uneasily. She didn't actually know. She didn't have any ideas on what kind of herbs could fully repair a broken leg. She has never cured anything like it before. When she lived with the twolegs, she had heard of a cat having a cast, but they had nothing like it here. "I don't know." she confessed, meeting Yellowfang's gaze.

"Come on, let's check on the Cinderpaw, and then we'll see how much more herbs we should collect." Yellowfang rasped and padded back into the medicine den.

Waterpaw's mind was buzzing. She couldn't worry about herbs now. She had to figure something out to help her clanmate.

"Waterpaw," Yellowfang's yowl crept into her thoughts and she shook her head to clear it. She scampered into the den and headed straight to the back where Cinderpaw laid. She hadn't moved. Was she completely paralyzed? Shaking her head again, she scanned over the gray apprentice carefully. She brushed her nose across her flank and felt Cinderpaw flinch from the touch.

"She will be fine for now." Yellowfang whispered in her ear.

Waterpaw could hear her pawsteps coming closer and wasn't afraid when she approached, but the stench of her breath was enough to make her shrink back her neck. She followed Yellowfang to the shelves of herbs. Most of them were jumbled together-with just enough room for a claw to make its way through.

"We still need some more coltsfoot." Yellowfang meowed.

Waterpaw sighed, sitting beside her mentor. "Should I go and fetch some?" She was generally the one who would leave camp to find

the herbs. Though she didn't seem to ever mind.

"No. I can go this time. You stay and perhaps get some rest. Cinderpaw will be in a lot of pain soon." she bounded out of the medcine den, moss dangling down scraped against her flank, leaving some clinging to her thick fur.

Waterpaw didn't have a chance to protest, but she wasn't disappointed with the idea of staying in the den for once. Now she could think of something to cure Cinderpaw. She climbed into her nest and rested her head on her paws. Not able to close her eyes, she stared at the smoky gray she-cat, her eyes filled with worry. *What if I can't do it?*

She closed her eyes tightly, not wanting to think of something so mouse-brained. If a twoleg can do it, then surely a cat could do the same. *We're smarter than they are*. She told herself.

"Waterpaw?" She jumped from the sudden voice piercing through her thoughts, her eyes now open and wide with shock. "Sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you. I just wanted to talk." the tom continued.

Waterpaw blinked, realizing it was Fireheart standing at the entrance. "What are you doing here?" she croaked, and yawned as if she was just awoken from slumber.

"It might have been Tigerclaw." Fireheart whispered, sitting down, letting the moss drape over his head.

"How?" He had her attention now.

"I overheard Tigerclaw talking to another tom."

"Who?"

Fireheart hesitated, trying to remember if he knew who the tom was, but no matter how hard he tried, he did not know who he was. "I don't know," he confessed.

"Well, what did he say?"

"I couldn't hear everything, but he said 'she took the bait', which leads me to think it had to be him."

Waterpaw thought for a moment, not really knowing how to comprehend what she had just heard."What about Ravenpaw?" She finally mewed, remembering how the black tom was always afraid of his own mentor. "Does he think the same? Surely he would know something."

Fireheart shook his head, "He's no longer here" he confessed, shuffling his paws onto the muddied ground below.

"What do you mean?" *Had he died?* But she gulped down the words before she could say them out loud.

"He's fine" Fireheart reassured her. "Graystripe and I took him to Barley's farm. He's safer there. Tigerclaw assumes he had died. I suppose he's now trying to hurt me by getting to my apprentice."

"When?" Waterpaw didn't remember them being out of camp.

"Just a few sunrises ago." he explained.

"Thank you for telling me this." she purred, though she was a bit mad she wasn't told about Ravenpaw leaving camp. He was the only one who knows about Tigerclaw and what he saw and did. With him gone, she was blinded by his treacheries. She had more to ask him. They were no closer to solving this and even further now that he's gone.

Fireheart padded away in silence, leaving Waterpaw to her thoughts. Cinderpaw fidgeted, then made a low whimpering sound from agony. Waterpaw quickly got to her paws and grabbed some raspberry leaves from the pile and dropped them in front of the gray she-cat. "This will help with the pain." She nudged it closer to Cinderpaw with her nose.

Cinderpaw coughed, then with a weak head, she lifted it and lapped up the leaves, chewing them slowly. She closed her eyes again, still wincing from movement she tried to make.

"Keep still." Waterpaw whispered softly, remembering how gentle

Spottedleaf always was when she spoke. She could do nothing now for her young friend. All she could do is wait.

She sat a few tail-lengths from Cinderpaw, still watching her as she slept, her sides heaving up and down. "I have to think of at least something." she whispered to herself, swishing her tail to and fro with annoyance. She closed her eyes, thinking hard on all the herbs they had, but none could cure a broken leg. She could only numb the pain.

She dropped down, letting herself now lay flat on the ground, her chin resting on her paws. She sighed deeply, keeping her eyes still shut tight.

She shot up, eyes suddenly wide. "I've got it." She mewed out loud, but not enough to wake anyone. *I might have a way to help Cinderpaw*. She felt a sudden wave of pride rush through her. When Yellowfang returns, she would head out in search of some sticks.

Chapter Ten

Yellowfang couldn't come back fast enough. Waterpaw sat and waited for what seemed like moons. Her soft white coat bristled from the wind as the sun began to descend. It was just before dark when Yellowfang finally arrived into camp. She could see her dark gray fur heading into the clearing and veered toward the medicine den with coltsfoot in her jaws, along with another herb Waterpaw couldn't determine right away.

"I found some coltsfoot," Yellowfang mumbled with the herbs still in her mouth, "and some sage. I'm thinking it might help Cinderpaw with the pain a bit better. It used on elders, but it should work." she dropped the bundle in front of Waterpaw at the entrance.

Waterpaw looked down at it, and back up at Yellowfang, her amber eyes filled with worry. "Will this be enough?"

Yellowfang could only shrug her shoulders, "I don't know. We can only hope." she meowed.

"I—Can I go find some sticks? I think if we bind the sticks to her leg, it could heal her." Waterpaw's voice was just barely above a whisper.

Yellowfang, eyes round with confusion, sat and started to go through the herb pile she brought in. Waterpaw watched in silence, patiently waiting for her response, though she itched to get going before it got any darker. "I'm not sure what you're up to, Waterpaw. But I'll let you be in charge of finding a cure for Cinderpaw." she finally rasped, swiping her tongue over her yellowed-tooth which stuck just a hair-length out from her lower jaw.

"Thank you," Waterpaw dashed away and scrambled up the rock wall. She knew some sticks would probably be close by. They didn't have any storms recently, but surely at least a stick or two would have fallen from a squirrel or bird. The thought of her being the one to take care of Cinderpaw made her feel the weight on shoulders.

Though she had an idea on what she could do, didn't she knew what she was doing. If this didn't work, she was all out of ideas, and Cinderpaw could die! She shook her head to clear it, and continued to search for something she could use to bind the leg.

Upon looking around carefuly, she could only find one stick. It was big enough for her to grasp it in between her teeth without breaking. She would have to venture a little further. It wasn't dark just yet—she had at least a bit more time. She padded up toward Sandy Hollow, passing a lot of towering trees.

"Finally." she purred, picking up another stick just a few tail-lengths from the battle training grounds. Making it back to camp, darkness came and silverpelt shimmered over them. Yellowfang was still going through the herbs she had brought back—the pile nearly finished.

She hooked the leaf onto her claw, and looked up at Waterpaw as she made her way into the den with two sticks in her mouth. Then she went back to the herbs, carefully tearing it with her teeth.

Waterpaw padded to the back—near the small pool of water—where Cinderpaw lay and dropped the two sticks next to her. She scanned Cinderpaw's leg. She was laying on her side, but the broken leg faced down on the ground. Waterpaw couldn't get to it properly. She would have to turn Cinderpaw over, without hurting her.

She gulped, and prodded Cinderpaw's flank gently with her paw. "Can you help me turn you over? I'm going to bind your leg." she explained calmly.

Cinderpaw opened her blue eyes groggily from sleeping all day, and tried to turn her body, but screeched in agony. Waterpaw flinched from her friend's screams and crouched low to the ground until she stopped. "Let's do this slowly." Waterpaw meowed, pressing her nose to her shoulder when Cinderpaw finished panting.

"Okay," Cinderpaw mewed, just barely loud enough for Waterpaw to hear. She was weak, and Waterpaw knew it. She had no strength to pull herself up, and the pain was more than she could imagine. Waterpaw went around to the other side of her and grabbed the

scruff of her neck. Perhaps she would she try to turn her part-by-part.

Cinderpaw didn't make a sound, but Waterpaw could tell it still hurt her in some way. She put her down her slowly, and did the same with her flank, and leg, but making sure the broken one didn't flop down too hard. Cinderpaw whimpered, but bit down,and closed her eyes tightly.

"You did it." Waterpaw purred. "You're so brave." She almost regretted saying those words—thinking she may have sounded like she was talking to a kit, but Cinderpaw only sighed with relief and purred with gratitude. "Alright. This might hurt again. I'm going to lift your leg, and try to bind them to the stick. It will feel stiff and awkward, but I think within time, it could heal."

She lifted Cinderpaw's leg, and put a stick in between, then gently pressed it against the other one. Picking up the other stick, she placed it on top of her broken leg and kept her paws firmly on to top keep it in place. There was strings of moss just beside her, and on the other was the pool of water. She bent down and nicked some moss from the rocks, then tightly wrapped it around the two sticks and her legs.

Cinderpaw kept herself silent though Waterpaw still knew it had to hurt—even if she was being as gentle as she could. "Thank you." she breathed, once Waterpaw was finished.

"You'll have to lay still for a while. I can give you some poppy seeds if you like? But I won't give you much more after today. We can use some other remedies."

Cinderpaw nodded her head slowly, then flopped it back down on the ground. Waterpaw handed her a few poppy seeds and let them slip into her mouth, then drifted off to sleep soon after. Waterpaw watched her until she saw her eyes close. She was worried about her. She didn't know if this would work. It looked convincing—sort like a crutch, but could it be enough?

Chapter Eleven

It was now two moons since Waterpaw had the idea of binding Cinderpaw's leg. It was a long two moons for Cinderpaw, but Waterpaw tried her best to keep her entertained. When Cinderpaw was strong enough, she could lift her chest up, and drag her body across the medicine cat floor. Waterpaw worked with her, pressing herself against her body, keeping her steady. She could now slither around gracefully, keeping her body parallel with the sticks. It stayed in place nicely, and Waterpaw would change it almost every quarter moon.

Cinderpaw did grow a bit, but her body was still weaker than her brother Brackenpaw, who was out training to be a full warrior—while she was stuck here in the medicine den. Waterpaw tossed mossballs to her to keep up her strength, but most of the time, Cinderpaw helped with medicine cat duties. She didn't seem to mind, though Waterpaw felt like she didn't want this kind of role forever.

"Take Cinderpaw out. She's getting very restless today." Yellowfang hissed, from the entrance.

Waterpaw padded from the clearing, herbs clinging to the side of her jaws. "Out? What do you mean by out" she mumbled. Cinderpaw hadn't been out of the den since her injury. Was it really a good idea?

"Outside of the den." Yellowfang hissed again, just as Waterpaw had suspected. "She could use some fresh air." Her tongue was sharp.

Waterpaw hadn't known what Cinderpaw had done to make her mentor mad, but she didn't dare to ask now. She padded toward the young apprentice and dropped the herbs beside Yellowfang. "Does your leg hurt?"

Cinderpaw shook her head, "nope." she purred. "Well, a bit, but I can manage it." she confessed.

Waterpaw rumbled a purr in her throat as she spoke, "Then let's try taking off these sticks and see how you do on your legs."

Cinderpaw's blue eyes brightened and she couldn't hide her smile as she closed her eyes. "Oh thank StarClan."

Waterpaw unwrapped the tiny tendrils and bit down on the sticks, breaking them apart. Her legs were now free, and laid face down. Cinderpaw stared, eyes wide, at her back legs for a while before finally trying to stand up. Waterpaw stayed by her side, making sure she was steady once again.

Cinderpaw lifted her chest, and heaved herself up, leaning heavily onto Waterpaw until she could get a grasp on the feeling of her back legs again. The were firmly on the ground, and she wobbled around the medicine den.

"Oh you're doing really well, Cinderpaw." meowed Fireheart standing at the entrance, his flame-colored pelt shimmering in the sunlight. "Do you think she'll be able to do some training soon?"

Waterpaw looked up, a bit startled from the sudden voice speaking to her. "She is progressing well. But it could be another moon till she is ready." she mewed.

"Great." He dipped his head. "I have to go. Graystripe is sick today. So I have to take his apprentice out." Fireheart added, then bounded of the den.

Waterpaw could feel a sudden pang of anger rise in Cinderpaw's chest. She was jealous of her brother being able to train all these moons. She was behind already, and Waterpaw knew she would have to try really hard if she wanted to catch up with her brother. Though Waterpaw still had doubts she could fully become a warrior.

"It's half-moon tonight, don't forget." Yellowfang rasped from the back, "we'll have to leave soon."

Waterpaw blinked her eyes. She had forgotten about going to the Moonstone. Perhaps StarClan would have some answers on if she

will be a warrior. But of course, even she knew, StarClan wouldn't tell her even if they did. It would just be in a tongue she never knew.

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Cinderpaw was now asleep—Waterpaw had wrapped her leg again but with just the moss this time to make it comfortable. She then tucked in tiny pieces of flowers to add a little color.

Yellowfang flicked her tail and padded out of the den with Waterpaw behind her. They made their way out of the gorse tunnel and down the familiar path to Mouthermouth. Once they got to the hill, Waterpaw felt relieved to finally see the face of Mudfur and Barkface.

"Is Runningnose here yet?" Waterpaw asked once she neared Mudfur, sitting to next to the brown tom.

"Not yet." he meowed shaking his head. "How is Cinderpaw? Is she healing well?"

"Yes, she's healing great." Waterpaw purred, closing her eyes and feeling rather proud of herself. "We tried walking today. She was wobbly, but it's progress."

"She has has come a long way." Yellowfang rasped, looking at her apprentice with gratitude.

Runningnose made his way down the steep hill, then sneezed once he was a fox-length away. Waterpaw couldn't imagine how he managed to be still sick during the time of Newleaf and Greenleaf. It was just the end of Newleaf, and everything was in full bloom around them. Birds chirped in the distance and swirled above in the open sky.

"We should get going inside then." he sniffled, heading inside the dark tunnel first. Waterpaw followed, itching to speak with StarClan about Cinderpaw, though she didn't expect any answers.

Inside the Moonstone was brighter than ever, sparkling and making the ground twinkle and dance as if the whole of StarClan were

waiting for them.

Yellowfang stepped up to the front and puffed out her chest. "I, Yellowfang, medicine cat of ThunderClan call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help she will serve her Clan for many moons." She turned to her apprentice, eyes shown with pride. "Waterpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivarly between Clan and Clan, and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

Waterpaw froze. Was she really about to become a full medicine cat? She didn't feel nearly ready enough. She kept her prideful gaze with Yellowfang, but shuffled her paws, not knowing if she truly was ready for a duty so powerful. She had the power to do what Mudfur did to her many moons ago when she first fell into the gorge. She had to power to help those in need around her, no matter what Clan they were in, even if it meant death. She bowed her head. "I do." she purred.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Waterpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Waterlily. StarClan honors your fearless spirit and energy. And we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ThunderClan."

Chapter Twelve

Waterlily touched her nose to the stone, closing her eyes instantly. Stars swept over her as she opened them, recognizing the familiar scents of StarClan's hunting grounds. She lifted her muzzle and let the smells come to her, opening her jaws to taste the air. Squirrels and mice filled her nostrils, but then another scent she did not recognize came drifting by.

"Waterlily, we welcome you as a full medicine cat." the tom meowed, dipping his broad head.

Waterlily padded closer to the open moors, which stretched further than she could see. The thick forest around her began to thin and she could se a brightly colored orange tom. More cats gathered around him, circling her.

Waterlily felt a wave of unease as cats she didn't know kept coming. Was the whole of StarClan coming to see her? She sat down and waited for the rest of them to settle, wrapping their tails neatly over their front paws. Each cat almost looked the same—the way they sat, their heads and chest held high with pride, their tails curled, but still twitching with happiness. They were here for her. The unease washed away, and she got to her paws, greeting the familiar face of Featherwhisker.

"Thank you," she purred to the orange tabby, once everyone was still and quiet from the soft echoes of congratulations. As she looked around at each face of the cats, she began to recognize some of them. There was Redtail. He was young again, no bruises, no wounds, and not a single scar. He held himself with pride as he looked at Waterlily and smiled, then dipped his head. Lionheart sat next to him, his broad neck fur bigger and brighter than she has ever seen it before covered in stars.

"StarClan is honored to have such a wonderful medicine cat to take care of ThunderClan for us." meowed the comforting voice of

Spottedleaf from behind her.

"You deserve this. You will be great for many moons." meowed another she-cat Waterlily didn't recognize. She was a muddy gray tabby, with pale yellow eyes.

"Waterlily, Waterlily!" yowled the crowd of cats around her. It sounded like lightening was piercing through her ears. But she was proud of her new name, though she didn't know if she truly deserved it. Cinderpaw wasn't cured yet. This could be the end, but she shook her head to clear it and spoke loudly, to hopefully get through them all.

"Thank you. I will try my hardest to serve my Clan." she turned back to Spottedleaf who was sitting just a tail-length in front of her, eyes gleaming. "Will Cinderpaw ever be a warrior?" she asked, not hiding her curiosity.

Spottedleaf didn't flinch from her words as if she had already suspected the question. She looked down at her paws, not able to look Waterlily in the eyes. "I am not sure. You're doing great work with her." She was careful not to bring her former apprentice down, "but it could be so, where she might have to stay with you."

"No," Waterlily breathed. "No, I can't let that happen. Cinderpaw doesn't want to be cooped up inside camp all day. She wants to run. She wants to hunt."

"Then so it will be." Spottedleaf meowed, pressing her forehead against Waterlily's. "You will do great things." she added with a purr, then pulled away, letting herself fade from view with the others as Waterlily slowly began to open her eyes from her dream.

"No, Spottedleaf! Wait! Please!" She wailed, but was already back inside the Moonstone, blinking open her eyes. Yellowfang scrambled to her paws and glanced over at her, then began her tread up the tunnel, following behind Mudfur and Barkface. Runningnose scampered behind Waterlily as she made her way into the darkness.

Once they reached camp, Waterlily made her way into the den, and

first went to check on Cinderpaw, who was still curled up, fast asleep. Her hurt leg was sprawled out behind her, still kept straight. It was bruised, and had a pink ring around the edges of where the sticks used to lay. Waterlily felt sorry for the young she-cat. She narrowed her eyes and pulled back her ears. *She will become a warrior. I will make sure of it.* She promised herself once more.

"How is she?" Yellowfang rasped from behind her.

"She's fine." Waterlily meowed, padding back to the herb store and sat down to start inventory. Yellowfang settled into her nest and tucked in her paws, then closed her eyes.

"Aren't you going to count?" asked Waterlily, keeping her gaze fixated on the herb stash she was about to count. She picked up a big leaf and pawed the poppy seed onto them, and laid it gently on the ground.

"I'm old and tired." she yawned, resting her head down, and closing her eyes again.

Waterlily kept quiet, amused by her mentor's words, and lost count, having to start again. "One, two, three, four, five—"

"Waterpaw, I have a favor to ask." meowed a tom.

"Oh, I just received my medicine cat name." she purred happily, as she stopped counting and looked up at her morning visitor. "It's Waterlily now."

"Congratulations, Waterlily." he meowed again.

"Thank you. What can I do for you, Fireheart?" She greeted the flame-colored tom with a curt nod, and she sat down now facing him.

He lowered his head and whispered as low as he could, Waterlily had to strain closer just to hear him. "Graystripe is up to something. I think he's seeing Silverstream, but I don't know." he rambled his words fast.

Waterlily pushed him out of the den, and looked over her shoulder

so they were clear of being within earshot range of Yellowfang. Looking back at Fireheart, she tilted her head to the side, not able to comprehend the words her friend just told her. "Who's Silverstream?" she breathed, not able to hide her confusion and anger for him not telling her any details.

Fireheart quickly glanced around making sure no one else was around then continued to speak quietly, "Just the other day, he had claimed he was sick because he almost drowned in the river. A RiverClan cat, Silverstream saved him. I think they're seeing each other. But I don't want to be a bad friend."

Waterlily thought for a moment. She never did see the warrior come into the den for any herbs. If he fell into a river, he would have been at least a bit in shock. She knew how it felt to sneak out to want to see someone she thought was special. She didn't want to be a hypocrite. It would just make her fox-brained if they ever found out. Choosing her words carefully, she finally spoke. "And what is it that you would like me to do?" He came to her for a reason, asking for a favor—it had to mean something.

"Can you find out for me? You're a medicine cat. No one would suspect you following him. Besides you smell of herbs and mint." He begged.

Waterlily ruffled her fur and purred with amusement, "I can head out there at sun high."

Chapter Thirteen

"Can you stretch it out like this?" meowed Waterlily, stretching out her leg as far back as she could, flexing out her claws.

Cinderpaw lifted her once broken leg, and stretched it, but grunted and pulled it back, placing it safely onto the ground. "No." she mewed, lowering her head, feeling utterly defeated.

"Don't worry. You'll be able to do this in no time." encouraged Waterlily.

"Ppff, yeah right." Cinderpaw shut her eyes and turned away from her, not able to face Waterlily's soft amber gaze. "Just admit it. I'll never be a warrior."

"Not with that attitude." she snapped. She padded to the other side of her and sat down. "That's enough exercises for today." she added softly.

Cinderpaw wobbled slowly to her nest, dragging her leg on the ground behind her.

Waterlily nosed her way to the entrance and stood, looking out into the clearing—lost in thought. Cinderpaw was losing faith in herself. If she loses it all, she might not actually be the warrior she wants to be. Waterlily closed her eyes, and lifted her head to the sky. "StarClan please." she breathed.

"You've gotten this far. Do you really think you'll give up on her now?" rasped Yellowfang.

Waterlily opened her eyes to see her mentor standing in front of her. Her broad, flattened face was wrinkled with annoyance. "N-no." she stammered. "No. I won't ever give up on her." she meowed, but with more power.

"This is why you deserve to be a medicine cat." Yellowfang

reassured her. "You have the stubbornness of one."

Waterlily raised herself and a shiver ran down her spine. "Thank you." she purred, pressing her forehead against the flat-faced she-cat. "Thank you." she meowed again. She glanced over the shelves of herbs they had, and noticed some lavender was missing from the scents. "Lavender, can I go get some? I'd like to get out of camp for a bit. To clear my head." she lied. She was headed to Sunningrocks, to check on Graystripe and see what their friend was really up to.

"I'll do the rest of inventory then." Yellowfang agreed, and made her way around Waterlily and into the medicine den.

Waterlily padded up the ravine and ducked out the gorse tunnel. She trekked down the path which lead through the sandy hollow and a thin set of trees. She found a patch of mint leaves and rolled around herself into the leaves, covering her scent. She chewed off a few leaves to bring back to ThunderClan so she didn't have to explain why her scent was so strong of mint when she was supposed to be getting lavender.

She crouched down low when she reached close to the river. Hearing sudden voices, she quickly darted across the sand and into a bush full of fern and bracken. She could easily hide here, blending in with the bracken and long tendrils of the fern. She crouched down again and stared at two cats sharing tongues under in broad day light.

"Thank you for meeting with me all these times." meowed Graystripe, his eyes focused on the silver-gray tabby she-cat beside him.

Waterlily blinked her eyes, not wanting to believe what she was seeing, but she kept quiet, eager to know if she truly felt the same.

"I would cross the border a thousand times for you." She pressed her body close to his.

Waterlily shook her head. She loved him! She backed away slowly, still thinking what she was saw could be some sort of vision of dream. But there were still there, no matter how many times she

tried to blink it away. She stepped onto a stick, making a loud cracking noise and she bolted away from view, hoping no one had seen her.

Both Graystripe and Silverstream tossed their heads around in the direction of Waterlily, but saw nothing. She gave one another worried glances, but made sure to keep an eye out for anyone who could be watching. Waterlily decided not to stay and find out if they saw her; she ran all the way to camp—ready to tell Fireheart what she just saw—jumping over the fresh-kill pile and stopped a whisker-length from the warriors' den. "Fireheart? Are you in here?" she called out, out of breath and panting.

She didn't hear any replies, nor did she see any pair of bright eyes looking back at her. The den must have been empty. She glanced over at the clearing and spotted Fireheart heading back into camp with Brackenpaw pridefully walking beside him.

"Fireheart." she called out, scampering over to him. Brackenpaw headed into the medicine den to check on his sister, but was quickly pushed away when Cinderpaw saw him coming. She still loved her brother, but the jealousy took its toll whenever he tried to come and comfort her.

"Fireheart," she called out again, finally catching up to him.

He turned to face her, his eyes expressionless for just a mere second, switching to worry for his gray friend, "Did you see anything?" he asked immediately meeting her gaze.

She nodded her head slowly, "yes, down by the river's edge. He was near the old bridge and Silverstream was there."

Fireheart took a big sigh, but kept his head held high. "I'll follow him tomorrow and confront him."

Waterlily dipped her head in agreement, though she didn't know why she had to go and spy on him if Fireheart was just going to there anyway. His gaze traveled to the medicine den, watching as Cinderpaw licked her front paw, swiped it over her face and then flicking it when she had finished. He walked over to her, longing to

see how his former apprentice was doing.

Waterlily trekked alongside him, "You miss her, don't you?" she prodded.

Fireheart glanced over at her, his bright green eyes filled with worry. "Yes. I still feel like I should have been closer to her. I was too far away to know anything." he admitted, nearing the medicine den. "Cinderpaw, you're doing really well, thank StarClan." he meowed, trying to stay positive.

"She is doing very good." purred Waterlily, noticing his sudden tone of pity.

Cinderpaw looked up at him, her blue eyes dull as if she was too busy loathing herself all day. Her cheeks were sunken in from not getting enough nutrients, but she told everyone she was feeling fine. "I am doing what I can." Cinderpaw finally responded, her voice was still raspy from sleep.

"I can come and visit you tomorrow," promised Fireheart. He darted off before Cinderpaw could refuse any company. Though, her reaction said otherwise.

"Cinderpaw," mewed Waterlily, "are you okay?"

Cinderpaw's eyes turned to her, still round, like she had been caught in a daydream for too long and couldn't escape. She shook her head as if to clear it then looked back out into the distance watching the flame-colored tom make his way to the fresh-kill pile, then sat by the warriors den to eat a small mouse. "Of course. Why?" she mewed, still half-dazed.

"Just making sure." she replied, making sure not to pry for any more answers. She didn't want to assume the young apprentice had a crush, but she had her guesses on who the tom might just be.

Chapter Fourteen

"Bluestar!" cried out a tom, his paws thundering into camp. The blue-gray she-cat emerged from her den, eyes wide with worry and alert. She heaved herself onto the high rock and let the pale tabby talk. "We found RiverClan scent in ThunderClan territory." he panted, stopping just below the ledge.

"How many, Longtail?" she demanded, her voice was urgent.

"Not sure. A couple maybe. Whitestorm and I were patrolling the border alongside Sunningrocks. Dustpaw smelled a RiverClan warrior, and we searched around for anymore. I thought there would be an ambush, but it was stale, a day old at least. They'll probably be back." he meowed, keeping his gaze on Bluestar, his paws trembling as he spoke.

"We must attack them." growled Darkstripe, taking a step forward. "At night when they least expect it."

"No." Bluestar lashed her tail, hissing. "I will not risk my Clan if I don't have to. Mark the borders twice as much. Split into groups of two, to make it go faster." she ordered.

The warriors around her dipped their heads in acceptance and split into groups of six. A few of them went to Sunningrocks, while the others went toward the old Thunderpath. Waterlily scampered out into the clearing once everyone dispersed and made her way up the ledge and announced herself to her leader.

"Come in." came the fain mew of Bluestar from deep inside her den. Waterlily padded inside, enjoying the cold, damp air from in the stone walls.

"Bluestar, do you have a moment to talk?" Waterlily had a lot to speak with her leader. A lot of time has passed since she last spoke of her visions, and what all she knew of her deputy. She already

knew Bluestar wouldn't listen, but it was worth a try—besides, she has a right to know.

"I have time, yes of course. Do you bring any new visions?" Bluestar's voice was calm.

No new visions, I'm afraid." she replied, sitting down and matching Bluestar's posture by wrapping her tail over her front paws. "But I do have news about what I know of Tigerclaw and—"

"I told you, Tigerclaw is no threat." Bluestar growled.

"Sorry, I didn't..." she paused for a moment, trying to gather her thoughts once again. If Bluestar wouldn't talk about Tigerclaw, then perhaps she will talk about Cinderpaw. "I'm worred about Cinderpaw."

"I think you're doing well with her. But she has to know, she will never be a true warrior." she meowed boldly.

Waterlily slightly narrowed her eyes. Even her leader had little faith in her Clan. "I think she has at least a chance." she argued.

"Cinderpaw has an injured leg that may never heal. What if she can't run as fast as the others? What if she..."

"What if she dies?" Waterlily finished the sentence for her, "She would die in battle or at least die trying just like any other warrior here. Her life is no different than yours." Waterlily was now furious. "This is your last life, Bluestar. Surely you know what it's like to not know when our day will come." she added with a hiss.

Bluestar's eyes widened. She hadn't heard her medicine cat speak to her like this before. She was quite taken back, but she soon narrowed her eyes as she spoke, "I will not be spoken to like an apprentice." she rose to her paws and bristled her neck fur.

Waterlily kept her thick fur flat on her body, trying to stay calm. "I clearly have wasted your time. I'm sorry, Bluestar. I will make my way out." she meowed, rising to her paws and heading out of the den, dragging her tail behind her. She sighed once she reached the entrance, then jumped down from the ledge.

"What's gotten you so down? You look as if ShadowClan stole the whole supply of herbs." meowed Fireheart, stopping her in the middle of the clearing.

"Bluestar won't listen to me is all." she confessed. "Are you on your way to see Graystripe?" she quickly changed the subject.

"Yeah, not sure how it'll go. He could hate me for saying anything to him."

"He's your best friend, Fireheart. He won't hate you. He'll just be disappointed." she reassured him.

Fireheart let out a purr of amusement, "Thanks."

"Did you tell Bluestar the truth about Ravenpaw?" She wanted to know if she at least accepted something they've told her.

"Yes. She was relieved he was alive, but confused on the reason. But I don't think we have to worry about Tigerclaw finding out. He thinks he's dead."

Waterlily sighed, "good." She rose to her paws then headed for the medicine den, "Good luck with Graystripe." she purred back over her shoulder.

"Thanks." Came the faint mew of Fireheart as he made his way up the ravine and out of view. Waterlily padded into the medicine den and to the back where the puddle of water lay. Cinderpaw was sprawled out in her freshly-made nest of moss. It kept her cool during the hotter days like today.

"You did great today with the herbs." she praised.

Cinderpaw raised her head and slightly smiled, though Waterlily knew it was forced, "I had a good teacher." she purred, then laid her head back down on her paws.

Waterlily walked to the herb stock they had. Everything was in neat, but tight piles, close together. Cinderpaw did well with the herbs. She was beginning to understand some of the treatments and would often help them chew them into a poultice for the elders.

She grabbed some of the leaves from the daises, delicately tearing them with her teeth, then headed back out of the den and across the clearing to the elder's den. She ducked inside and purred when she heard the familiar sounds of One-eye telling a story to Brackenpaw.

He sat there, eyes wide with amazement as she told continued the story. Halftail chiming in from to time. "He believed cats were stronger together than apart. He gathered those willing to listen—not because they were the strongest fighters, but because they shared hope. Others followed. River found comfort beside the water. Wind ran with the open moor. Shadow thrived beneath the dark pines." One-eye meowed.

"He had no choice but to head to the forests." Halftail chimed in.

One-eye narrowed her one, good, yellow, eye, then continued her story of the Clans. Waterlily had never heard this story before, so she padded close to Brackenpaw and laid down, listening to the old she-cat. "It wasn't until the first leaders walked beneath the stars and received their nine lives that the Clans truly became what we know today. The ancestors who had gone before looked down and promised they would never leave their descendants to face the forest alone."

She lifted her graying muzzle and continued, "and from that night onward, every medicine cat who touched the sacred moonstone, walked the same path those first had walked. Every prophecy, every dream, every warrior who has ever looked to stars, began with them."

Chapter Fifteen

The four Clans were good at their own skills. ShadowClan wouldn't be able to hunt in the forests, while ThunderClan can't fish in the river like RiverClan can't run super fast far beyond the moors. Waterlily couldn't imagine all four Clans in one place. It was chaotic enough during the Gathering, and only about half the Clans show up there.

"That was incredible." purred Brackenpaw, rising to his paws.

"I've never heard the story before. Do you think we could have worked together if they did in the end?" she boldly asked, dropping the herbs below her.

One-eye blinked in thought for a few moments before replying. "Yes. I think we could have. We wouldn't have known to go against each other for territories if we grew up beside one another."

Waterlily was impressed with her answer—she hadn't thought about that.

"I wouldn't like it. ShadowClan are fox-brained." Brackenpaw hissed.

Waterlily picked up the herbs again and padded over to Dappletail who was laying in the back of the den, curled next to Halftail. She placed them next to her and pushed them closer to the old-dappled she-cat. "You know these always help." she meowed.

Dappletail reluctantly chewed them until she could swallow them with ease. "Thanks." she croaked, once she finished with the last leaf.

"Do you want anything else for that cough? It may be Greenleaf, but even a cough turn into greencough." she asked, just before ducking out.

"I'm fine. You don't need to fuss over an old fool like me." she

rasped, her body trembling from the amount of energy she used to smile at her medicine cat. "Thank you, Waterlily."

Waterlily headed back into the medicine den, cutting across the clearing once more. Yellowfang padded in from behind her. "Can you give these to Brokentail?" she asked, dropping a few poppy seeds on front of her paws.

Waterlily looked down at the seeds for a mere moment before looking back up at her mentor. Brokentail, the former ShadowClan leader, was still held prisoner in their camp. He no longer stayed in the medicine den, but Yellowfang made sure to keep a close eyes on him. He was blind and still ached from pain, but Waterlily doubted that would stop him from at least trying.

"Sure." she meowed, picking up the poppy seeds with her lips and nosed her way to the old leader. She placed the tony black seeds near his paws. "It's poppy seeds. It'll help you get some rest." she explained, pushing them closer to him.

"I don't need poppy seeds." he snapped, spitting with anger.

"Yellowfang advised you take some." Waterlily hissed back.

"I don't have to listen to you." he growled, twitching the tip of his broken tail.

"Whether you take these or not is none of my concern. But it will help you if you need them." she growled bitterly between her teeth, then turned back to the medicine den, leaving Brokentail alone and to his thoughts.

"He won't accept them, will he?" Yellowfang meowed, greeting Waterlily with a curt nod as she approached the moss tendrils hanging down from the entrance.

Waterlily shook her head. "No. But I left them there. He might decide to eat them later."

"Very well." agreed Yellowfang, as she nipped off the buds from a flower. "Grab yourself some daises and start biting off the buds. They could be great use one day if they begin to open at least a bit."

she explained, beckoning her with her tail.

Waterlily sat beside her mentor and carefully bit off the tiny flower buds, then tossed them to the side of her. "What are we going to do with Brokentail? He's been with us for four moons now. We can't keep him here forever."

Yellowfang stopped and dropped the last bit of leaves she had in her mouth. "I don't know." she admitted, "he's on his last life, so he's just as vulnerable as the rest of us."

Waterlily gasped, "What if ShadowClan tries to take him back?"

"They won't. They've suffered too much, and have fought too hard for their freedom. He will not ever be returning to his old Clan."

"How can you be so sure?" Waterlily wasn't convinced.

"Nightstar is leader now, remember." Yellowfang softly growled, getting a bit irritated from her apprentice's questions.

"Do you truly believe that?" Waterlily's voice stayed calm, but her paws began to tremble.

Yellowfang looked up from her paws, a piece of flower petal still stuck to the side of her jaw, "You don't?"

"It just doesn't seem right." Waterlily openly admitted. "Think about it. The deputy knows more about the Clans than he does. During the Gathering, he just stands there, and repeats what the others have already said."

"Most leaders do that." argued Yellowfang.

"Not Crookedstar. Not Bluestar."

"They have been leader for many moons. Nightstar will get the hang of it." Yellowfang was clearly done with the conversation.

Waterlily enjoyed bantering with her mentor, but knew it would only upset her more. She padded to the back of the den to grab a few moss strands, then to the shelves, placing a few tendrils in

between each herb, separating them with a bit of fashion.

Pleased with herself, she took a step back and admired how organized the herb stash looked. Yellowfang put the last bit of buds onto the shelf, scooping them with her paws. "The Gathering's tonight." meowed Waterlily.

"Do you wish to stay back again to care for Cinderpaw?" Yellowfang asked, sitting down to wash her paws.

Waterlily thought about it for a moment. She loved the Gathering, but it was a nice change in pace to stay back for once. She didn't have to worry about putting on a show to the other Clans to hide their injuries. She didn't have to focus on her words, careful not to spill out any Clan secrets. And most of all, she didn't have to come face-to-face with the ShadowClan apprentice, Littlepaw. Though she hasn't seen him much for the past two moons, he would often fill her mind as she did the tedious chores. But she also missed talking with her fellow medicine cats and listening to their stories and tales of the old world before them.

"Cinderpaw is progressing well. She will be okay for a night to herself." Waterlily finally meowed.

Chapter Sixteen

Waterlily padded out into the clearing, waiting for the rest of her Clanmates to join her. She was a bit excited to be going to the Gathering again. The last two moons she didn't go, due to worrying so much about Cinderpaw, but for the first time, she's going as a newly appointed medicine cat of ThunderClan. She itched with excitement. Though the other medicine cats knew already, it would be nice to hear her new name be called by the others.

Yellowfang came up to the side of her and sat down, wrapping her plumbing tail over her paws. Rain trickled down from the sky, making the earth wet and soggy. Waterlily grunted with disgust as the Clan made their way out of camp and onto the muddy grounds. They trekked on their usual path leading down to the fallen trunk which made a bridge over the river. Each cat made their way across carefully, keeping their tails up for balance.

Waterlily crossed now with ease, getting used to the feel of the rough branch below her pads. Most of the Clan was quiet, with some murmurs in the distance ahead of her. She couldn't make out what they were saying, nor did she care to. She was eager to see Nightstar there. Perhaps the others would accidentally set a clue. Though she doubted they would—giving out any sort secrets of the Clans is never heard of.

The open grounds were filled with mush, as the rain poured down harder, drenching their coats. Waterlily padded faster, pushing past Mousefur and Willowpelt, not wanting to feel the wetness which now covered her pelt.

"The rain is coming down harder." Longtail pointed out with hint of irritation.

"You don't have to worry about thick fur." growled Graystripe from behind her.

Waterlily narrowed her eyes at the thought of Graystripe coming to

the Gathering. He had been sneaking out, pretending he needed rest, and all he gets is rewarded. Surely Bluestar wouldn't allow such things if she knew.

"We can shake it off once we get there." Bluestar called out, heading up the steep slope. She led her Clan further, then stopped at the ridge, looking down at the empty clearing.

"We're the first ones." It was Willowpelt who meowed, making her way down the hill. Bluestar leapt down, racing past the trees and into the huge clearing where a draped moss-covered boulder lay in the middle. It rose high above the forest grounds. Leaders say they could see far beyond the tree canopies.

"WindClan is close." purred Whitestorm, heading toward the great rock where the leaders spoke. He found a spot nestled close, and looked around as if to be waiting for someone to come to him. Waterlily bounded across as she saw Barkface pad down the narrow slope just east of the moon.

His light-brown colored coat shimmered in the full moon—it beamed down on them both as they greeted one another with a touch to the forehead. "Barkface. It's great to see you." she purred, pressing her forehead to his.

"Waterlily," he croaked, then cleared his throat, "how are you doing as a full medicine cat?" he asked more clearly this time.

"Very well, thank you. It still seems all surreal to me." she openly admitted.

Barkface sat down, keeping his tail pinned straight behind him. He twitched just the tip as he spoke, "And Cinderpaw, is she going to join you as a medicine cat apprentice?"

Waterlily jerked her head and stared at the brown tom. What did he mean, join her as an apprentice? She wasn't going to be a medicine cat. Is that what they thought of her—someone so useless, she's forced to become something she didn't want to? Waterlily shook her head, "No." she breathed, still in shock another medicine cat would have such little faith in the apprentice. "She will be back to

her warrior apprentice duties in just a half-moon from now." she added with a purr, hoping it was enough to satisfy the WindClan medicine cat.

"Good." he mewed, looking past Waterlily as he saw ShadowClan cats mix in with the Clans. Waterlily could smell the pungent scent of sickness a fox-length when Runningnose neared them.

"I almost didn't come." he confessed, "I think a sickness is coming to the Clans. But I might not know how to cure it." he added quietly, glancing around, making sure no one was within earshot.

"What kind of sickness?" Yellowfang rasped. She was from ShadowClan—perhaps she had seen this kind of thing before.

"I don't know." he whispered.

"Has it already come?" Yellowfang had urgency now in her mew.

Runningnose shook his head, "No. I only saw it in a dream."

Mudfur, the RiverClan medicine cat walked up behind Waterlily and sat down next to her, listening as Runningnose went on about the sickness in his dream. "It could be from our prey." he finished.

"Sounds like we should be on alert." Mudfur meowed cooly, flicking his tail.

"Yes, even we will check our prey just in case. It's better to be on the safe side." agreed Yellowfang.

"Let the Gathering begin." yowled Bluestar from the great rock.

Waterlily, alongside the rest of the crowd of cats, glanced up at the leaders, turning their bodies and ready to listen to whatever it was they had to say.

"I will begin." A tom, as dark as the night sky stepped forward. "I am now Nightstar." he began. "I went to the Moonstone last quarter moon when the night was clear. I have received my nine lives. ShadowClan is living well." he finished with a purr.

Bluestar kept a watchful gaze on him as she made her way to the front of the rock—like she didn't believe a word he had said. She scanned the clearing, then spoke, "We have scented RiverClan on our borders," she growled calmly. "We will not back down from a fight if we smell it again. On a happier note," she continued after a brief moment of silence. "we would like to welcome Waterlily as a full medicine cat of ThunderClan."

"Waterlily, Waterlily!" The Clans yowled, but Waterlily could sense them holding back from the threat of Bluestar. The RiverClan were afraid. But afraid of a fight?

Crookedstar took a step forward, towering over Bluestar with his bulky build. "We did not cross into your borders." he meowed once the crowd of murmurs and congratulations died down.

"Then why did we smell someone from your Clan?" hissed Bluestar, keeping her claws sheathed.

"My Clan would never do such a thing. Not without my consent." he growled, lashing his tail angrily.

Bluestar narrowed her eyes, but still kept herself steady. "If we smell it again. There will be consequences." she hissed again, flattening her ears.

Tallstar stood in between them and pushed his way through the two leaders, though he knew Bluestar wouldn't break the truce. Not during a Gathering. "We mustn't fight among the stars now." he meowed calmly, twitching his long tail.

Waterlily could sense a wave of anxiety wash over Graystripe as they spoke about the RiverClan cat crossing their borders. Waterlily scanned over each head, wanting to see if she could spot the silver she-cat. But instead, she was faced with the same piercing blue eyes she's trusted for many moons staring back at her.

Chapter Seventeen

Waterlily was thankful the Gathering had finally come to an end—though she was certain a truce was about to be broken among the leaders. She followed her Clanmates back to camp, still thinking about the fact Bluestar had no idea about the troubles Graystripe is getting himself into.

"That was close." whispered Fireheart in Waterlily's ear as he caught up to her.

"They will find out." murmured Waterlily, trekking a little faster than he was.

Fireheart shook his head, "They won't." he promised.

Waterlily flicked her tail, "how do you know that?"

"I promised Graystripe I wouldn't say anything. Besides, after tonight, he'll probably be more careful."

Waterlily's eyes twinkled with uncertainty, but she wasn't going to the be one to jeopardize their friendship. If Graystripe wanted to sneak out for a pretty she-cat, it's on him. Waterlily had no need to worry.

Shaking out her fur from the damp air, she followed Bluestar and ducked into the gorse tunnel leading back to camp.

"What did RiverClan have to say about their scent in our territory?" meowed Dustpaw meaking his way into the clearing.

Bluestar heaved herself up onto the highrock. She knew the Clan was eager to know what had happened during the Gathering. Most of the cats had already come out their dens as they returned, and she had no need to call a Clan meeting. "They claim it wasn't them." she hissed over the crowd. "They said they never stepped foot on our territory." she turned to Darkstripe, who had been one of the

warriors to sniff it out first. "Darkstripe, are you sure it was RiverClan scent?"

Darkstripe nodded. "I know RiverClan scent. It was definitely one of them."

Waterlily couldn't help but shot a glance over at Fireheart who was sitting next to his friend, Graystripe. Graystripe kept his head held high, but she could see worry and guilt flickering in his eyes.

"The next time it is scented here, " Bluestar continued, taking a step forward and puffing out her chest, "we will fight. I will tolerate them trying to hunt in our territory." she finished with a growl.

Murmurs of agreement pulsed through the Clan like a wildfire, and roared above Waterlily's ears. She wanted no part in this. She couldn't go into battle with RiverClan knowing it was only a warrior in love with another. She shook her head to clear it, then made her way into the medicine den. The Gathering had lasted longer than usual and exhaustion tugged at her every step. She curled into a tight ball in her nest, then fell fast asleep without another word or thought.

"Waterlily." whispered a familiar voice of a tom.

"What is it?" mewed Waterlily, blinking opening her eyes and yawning. Dawn just barely swept through the camp—only the guard just above the ravine was awake now. "Fireheart, what are you—"

"Shh," he hissed, swiping a paw gently over her mouth. "Graystripe hasn't come back yet. I'm worried." he confessed, beckoning her to follow him outside the den.

"You mean he left after the Gathering?" Waterlily was confused. Wasn't he tired from being up half the night?

"Yes, and he hasn't returned." Fireheart kept his voice low. "Come with me." he begged. Waterlily hesitated for a moment. She couldn't just leave Yellowfang wondering where she was too. Looking back over her shoulder at the old gray she-cat, she could see her sides

heaving with every breath. She couldn't wake her now. "Please." he begged again.

"Very well." she agreed, "but if we get into trouble for this, I'll claw your ears off myself." She brushed past him and scrambled up the rocky wall just above the medicine den. "You coming?" she glanced back only to find him standing there looking at her as if she had turned into a star-gazing badger.

He shook his head, then leaped up with ease with his powerful haunches. "I don't know what we'll find." he meowed once they got out of camp.

"Let's just hope they're ready to listen." Waterlily hissed, already feeling frustrated with the fact she could get into a lot of trouble for something she had no part in. She trekked faster, Fireheart having to trot a few times in order to catch up.

Once she reached Sunningrocks, she immediately ducked into the long grass, and crouched herself down low, letting her belly touch the ground.

"There they are," Fireheart whispered, creeping up slowly towards her, then peered out from between the thick blades of grass. "Just by the broken bridge."

"The same place they smelled RiverClan scent." she hissed again, narrowing her eyes.

Waterlily could smell the faint scent of river, but something stronger tinged at the base of her nostrils. She couldn't pin on what the scent could be. Lifting her head, she opened her jaws to taste the air. It wasn't anything she had smelled before—it wasn't any herb, and it couldn't be just the river or fish. Mudfur's pelt never gave off this kind of smell.

"Is there anyone else here?" Fireheart's sharp mew cut through her thoughts.

"No." She shook her head, keeping her gaze fixated on the two Clan cats.

Silverstream collapsed to the ground, grasping her belly. Waterlily widened her eyes, suddenly realizing what she had scented this whole time. But could it really be so? No. She shook her head again, clearing away the thoughts. It couldn't possibly be. Not caring if she was spotted, she raced down to them, grabbing a few sprigs of feverfew on her way.

"What happened?" she meowed, dropping the herb at her paws.

Panic swelled up inside Graystripe and his eyes were filled with worry. Waterlily lifted her tail and dipped her head, "Don't worry, I won't tell." she added, pushing the feverfew closer to the she-cat.

"I think I might be—ow!" Yowled Silverstream, her eyes shut tight from the pain shooting through her body.

"Can you swallow?" Waterlily pushed them even closer now, the herb just a whisker-length from the silver tabby's lips.

"I can." she breathed, still holding onto her belly, which Waterlily had noticed was swollen.

Taking a step back, Waterlily stared at Silverstream with horror and shook her head in disbelief. She didn't want to believe it. Would Graystripe really go so far as to have kits with another Clan?

Chapter Eighteen

She looked at the gray warrior, his yellow eyes filled with concern and worry. She couldn't leave her—it was her duty to help everyone in need, no matter what Clan. "Graystripe, this is dangerous." She mewed, nosing her muzzle around Silversteam's flank, where she could hear and feel two tiny kits wriggling inside her.

Graystripe kept his gaze fixated on the silver she-cat."Please," he wailed, "she can't do this alone."

Waterlily looked back at him, "I will need chervil and borage. Do either of you know what those look like?" Fireheart and Graystripe exchanged confused glances with each other, then back at Waterlily with the same blank face. She sighed, "Never mind, keep her here. I'll get the chervil. Fireheart, there's borage over there just by the ferns. It's a green leaf. Once you get some, tear it into smaller pieces for Silverstream to eat." she ordered, then leaped over them without another word.

She could hear soft whispers behind her, but she didn't care to listen—she was intent on getting chervil. It was found near Snakerocks. She just prayed she could get there in time. If she headed into camp, she'd only be questioned by Yellowfang. She raced through the trees as fast as her legs could carry her. She weaved into Tallpines and darted toward the herb garden just a few fox-lengths ahead. She scanned it, her jaws gaped open to taste for chervil.

There! Waterlily leaped over a tiny fence and onto a small pathway between the herbs which were in neat rows of six. Each herb was different—most of them which Waterlily did not know. Chervil was among them for now.

She nipped off some of the stems and held them tightly in her jaws as she dashed back through the tall-pined trees and through thick forest. When she nosed her way to back to Silverstream she thought maybe she was too late. Her body laid there motionless for what

seemed like moons until she finally took a heaving breath. Waterlily dropped the chervil and nudged them closer. "These will hopefully help." she mewed softly in her ear.

"Hopefully?" echoed Graystripe, stripped with panic.

"I—I've never done this before." she admitted. "I only know of the herbs that will help, but I don't know if I can do this without Yellowfang."

"We don't have time," meowed Fireheart.

Waterlily looked down. The silver tabby she-cat breathed heavily, and her birhgt blue eyes were darkening as she pushed. A small tiny kit squeaked from below her, and Waterlily picked it up delicately with her teeth and handed it to Fireheart. "Here, start licking it. I don't think she has enough strength. The kit could die still wrapped up like this."

Fireheart didn't question and began licking furiously. Graystripe raced to his mate's side. Waterlily turned back to Silverstream and another tiny kit slithered out, except she didn't hear any tiny mews. She quickly scooped it up, realizing Graystripe is no help to her now.

"What are you doing here with a RiverClan cat?" A low growl came from the distance.

Waterlily whirled around, her eyes wide with shock. They've been caught. She gulped, feeling anxiety fluttering through her body. When she saw the dark brown tom, long talons stuck out, though they were sheathed. *Tigerclaw*. She dropped the kit in front of him, hoping he wouldn't try to kill it. "Help me and lick this kit. It will die if it doesn't." she explained.

She turned back to Silverstream once more and raced to her side. She slid her paw slowly against her swollen belly, feeling for any more kits. "Those were the only two." she breathed.

"Silverstream?" whispered Graystripe, his voice shaking questionably. "Silverstream?"

Waterlily put her ear close to the silver tabby's chest, listening for the she-cat's breaths. It faded almost too silent for her to hear, then she took one last deep and long breath—she was gone. Waterlily looked up at Graystripe, only guessing how he's now feeling.

"Silverstream!" he yowled.

"I can't. I couldn't. I'm sorry." stuttered Waterlily, backing away from the two cats. Graystripe's eyes streamed with sadness. Fireheart ran to Graystripe's side and meowed in his ear, but Waterlily could barely hear against the loud wails of his friend. Tigerclaw angrily padded to her side, his amber eyes narrowed.

"This is against the warrior co—" he meowed, but was quickly interrupted by Waterlily.

"Shush." she hissed sharply. "This is not the time to say such things. You can punish him later, but they need help."

Tigerclaw glared at her, her eyes blazing angrily, then they softened. "Fine." he growled. "What are we doing with the kits?" he meowed loud enough for Graystripe and Fireheart to hear as they pricked up their ears and gazed at them with alarm.

"We will take them to ThunderClan." Graystripe meowed. "They are my kits."

"What will you tell RiverClan?" Waterlily was just as eager to know as Tigerclaw asked another daring question.

"Graystripe and Fireheart will bring her body to them and explain what happened. Tigerclaw and I can bring the kits back to the nursery. They will probably need milk soon." Waterlily replied, realizing they couldn't stand here much longer with two mewling kits. She grabbed a small gray one by the scruff and padded toward the trees. Tigerclaw reluctantly picked up the other one and followed the calico she-cat with narrowed eyes.

Waterlily trekked into camp, though she still hadn't any idea on what she would say to the queens or the rest of the Clan. Slipping through the gorse tunnel, she kept her head held high and made her

way through the clearing and ducked into nursery; Tigerclaw a tail-length behind.

They both put the mewling kits in front of Goldenflower, who already had two kits nestled in by her belly. "What's this?" she questioned, looking up at the two cats with disgust as she could clearly smell the RiverClan scent they carried.

"They're kits." hissed Waterlily. Her fur bristled, then she relaxed as she began to explain what happened. "Their mother had died and needs someone to care for them. They're Graystripes."

Goldenflower looked down at the two helpless kits, her green eyes softening as she stared at them for a while longer. She pulled them closer with her tail, letting them find their way in beside the other two. "Alright. Tell Graystripe, I'll care for them until they are weaned." she whispered.

"Thank you." Graystripe purred, pushing his way into the nursery. He looked down at his kits with pride, but Waterlily could still see the spark of sadness. The death of Silverstream has really hurt him. Waterlily dipped her head and let Graystripe through to see his kits. "Featherkit and Stormkit. Those will be their names."

Chapter Nineteen

Waterlily padded out into the clearing and met Fireheart as he squeezed through the tree roots of the entrance. "You were able to get to RiverClan so quickly?" she whispered, though every cat was around them, eager to see the new kits who have just arrived.

"I couldn't get him to leave his kits." Fireheart replied, keeping his tone low. "We'll have to go afterwards."

"This could mean a war, Fireheart. Do you know that?" she whispered harshly.

Fireheart turned to her, his bright green eyes round like an owl's, "Not if we explain what happened." he told her boldly.

"They may want the kits. Graystripe would be devastated."

"What if she lived? They would have to live with her, wouldn't they?" his whisper was sharp.

Waterlily thought about it for a moment. He wasn't wrong. They would have needed her milk. Graystripe would sneak out to see his kits. Not like it would change if they were brought back to RiverClan—he could barely be apart from them for enough time to bring her body to RiverClan.

"You two should go now." she meowed, ignoring his comment and realizing they left her out there, alone. Fireheart glanced back at the nursery over his shoulder; Waterlily guessed it was to see if his friend was ready to leave. But Graystripe was still huddled over the two tiny kits, his purr echoed in the den walls.

Waterlily flicked her tail impatiently, brushing it past Fireheart's flank. He jolted, then sprang to his feet to fetch Graystripe. The two warriors then ducked out of the entrance. She watched them trek up them ravine and fade into view as they neared the gorse tunnel.

Her plumbing tail twitched with unease. If Graystripe would have told her sooner, she could have saved his mate. She closed her eyes, barely able to bear her own thoughts.

"Waterlily?" Came the familiar voice of Yellowfang calling from the medicine den. She turned to see her mentor standing at the entrance, her head cocked to the side. "Where were you?" she pressed.

Waterlily gulped. What was she supposed to tell Yellowfang—she went to Sunningrocks and let a pregnant RiverClan she-cat die? She blinked for a moment, unsure on how to twist the words into something she'll understand.

"Are you going to answer me?" Yellowfang questioned again, her eyes narrowing with impatience.

Waterlily deeply sighed. No matter how hard she tried to think of something, she knew her mentor would see straight through her lie. "Silverstream. A RiverClan she-cat was having kits down the river in Sunningrocks," she explained, "Fireheart and I were going out to find some herbs when we saw Graystripe and Silverstream there. She was having pains and I had no herbs with me. I couldn't come here. It would have wasted too much time, so I went and got some herbs. But I'm afraid I might have been too late. Once her two kits were born, she—" Waterlily couldn't finish her sentence.

Yellowfang had guessed what her apprentice was about to was say as she placed her tail over Waterlily's flank. "Losing her was not your fault." Her voice rasped with age, but Waterlily could sense a bit of sympathy in the old she-cat. *Had she lost someone too?* Waterlily thought, but she mustn't prod her past now.

Waterlily brushed past her mentor, and headed towards the back where Cinderpaw lay. She was curled asleep on a freshly made moss by the pool. Waterlily padded closer to her and sniffed her leg which was still held straight out in front of her. The leg didn't smell infected, but she could still see a lot of red and it swelled just above her haunches. *She needs more time, but she would get better.* She told herself. *She will be able to become a warrior*. She told herself boldly.

"Let her sleep. She was up almost all day sorting through the herbs with me. She deserves some rest." Yellowfang meowed from behind her.

Waterlily turned the other way, leaving the young apprentice to sleep. She would train her more tomorrow. She still had lots to do before she could become a warrior apprentice.

The following morning, Waterlily shook out her fur as the sun beamed down on her. Cinderpaw limped to the entrance and puffed out her chest as she scanned the clearing. "We're gonna train out here?" she mewed, kneading the ground with excitement.

"Yes, but we still have to—"

Cinderpaw scampered to the clearing before Waterlily could finish. She skidded to a halt and tripped over one of her forepaws and went tumbling to the ground. "I'm okay." she mewed, shaking her head from her clumsiness.

She has always been a rather clumsy apprentice. Thought Waterlily. She padded after her and crouched down, as if she was ready to spring on a vole who had just popped it out of its hole. Waterlily was going to teach her move she was once taught by Spottedleaf. It was the only she knew, and it was easy enough for Cinderpaw to try. "Okay, you're going to try and knock me over." she ordered.

Cinderpaw stared at her blankly for a few moments, then leaped to her paws and jumped onto Waterlily, but Waterlily was too quick and she pummeled her to the ground, sending Cinderpaw tumbling backwards. "You made it too obvious." she mewed in her ear, standing over her. "How does your leg feel?"

"Great." Cinderpaw purred, scrambling to her paws, keeping her leg up for a few moments before resting it onto the grass below her. "It doesn't hurt at all."

Waterlily felt relieved to hear this. She was on her way to becoming a warrior after all. "You'll be ready to go back by half-moon." she breathed, crouching again. "Try again."

Cinderpaw turned to face her, and stood there, looking at Waterlily. She was resting on her haunches, but her chest was low, making her body leveled in all directions. It makes it hard for any opponent to knock them over. Waterlily remembered this stance when Spottedleaf would do it for her. She had to try many times before she could finally veer around fast enough to spring from the back and roll her over like a snake.

Cinderpaw sprang, but missed Waterlily by a tail-length, then swerved to her left, making Waterlily slightly unbalance herself from her paws reaching toward her. She landed heavily on the ground, and felt weight seeping into her shoulders. Feeling rather pleased with herself, Cinderpaw let out a battle cry, "Victory!" she yowled.

Waterlily shook her off, and scrambled to her paws. "Nicely done." she praised. "On the second try no less."

Cinderpaw padded back to the den with pride in every pawstep. Waterlily purred, feeling proud of herself as well. She had done what Yellowfang thought was impossible. But the thought of losing Silverstream was still caught in the back of her throat.

Chapter Twenty

It was nearly half-moon and Cinderpaw itched with anxiety. She paced around the medicine den floors more times than Waterlily could count. It made her feel uneasy, like something bad was going to happen at any given moment. She stopped Cinderpaw in her tracks, her eyes round with amusement. "Please, you're going to make a hole in the den." she mewed jokingly.

"I just wish it was half-moon already. It looks close enough to me." she complained, looking above at silverpelt. The moon glowed above them, high in the sky. Within the next few sunrises it would be half-moon. Cinderpaw looked at her with pleading eyes, "It's close enough." she repeated.

"When it is half-moon. You're nearly there." Waterlily padded back to her nest and laid down to sleep. She too was ready for Cinderpaw to get out of the den. She was becoming almost too much for them as if she was a kit who was getting too big for the nursery. Cinderpaw went back to her usual place near the pool, but kept her eyes open, deep in thought.

Waterlily closed her eyes, still tired from the long day she had from going out for herbs and doing more battle training with Cinderpaw —which wore her out the most. Cinderpaw was a fast learner, and she was getting stronger each day. Her leg had finally gone down from swelling, but Waterlily kept dried moss wrapped around the paw, still replacing it every couple of days.

She opened her eyes to the familiar grounds of StarClan. The forest stretched far beyond she could see, and a river split the land and moors. Prey was scented everywhere and flowers bloomed in every color imaginable. Waterlily opened her jaws to taste the air. Was anyone here? She couldn't smell anyone. Was this going to be another vision? She glanced around wearily, suddenly realizing she wasn't alone.

She could see no one, but the ground beneath her quickly changed

to the busy thunderpath. She was sitting on the edge, watching as monsters zipped by her, their yellow eyes shining brightly in hers, making her feel blinded. A small shadow appeared just across. Marbled stripes were outlined and she could see a familiar pair of blue eyes.

"Littlepaw?" she mewed.

"Waterlily. I am so glad to see you." meowed the tom from across the thunderpath.

His voice sounded so clear. Waterlily couldn't tell if she was actually dreaming. She blinked, keeping her gaze fixated on him. "I'm glad to see you too." she confessed. It was a dream after all. This couldn't happen in real life. What harm could a dream do? "Come on over here."

Littlepaw appeared beside her within seconds, and she jumped by surprise. "You're a medicine cat." he meowed, "without you, Cinderpaw could have died."

Waterlily had no idea how he knew about Cinderpaw. But if this was a dream, it meant this was all in her head. She shook her head to clear it. "But what about Silverstream?" If he knew about Cinderpaw, surely he knew of the silver tabby.

Littlepaw didn't flinch from her words and kept calm as he spoke, "She is in StarClan and her kits will grow to be great warriors." he promised.

Waterlily couldn't believe what she was hearing. Why was Littlepaw the one who had to tell her this? Had StarClan thought she wouldn't listen to them, they had to send the small tabby apprentice instead? More thoughts began to race through her. They couldn't have found out about her liking him, could they? She wasn't going to ever make it happen. She was a medicine cat—love is forbidden, but she was allowed to have close friends, no matter what Clan they were from.

"Thank you." she purred, leaning closer to the tom. She jolted awake when her chin smacked the stone ground as she fell from her

nest. Glancing around, she was back inside the medicine den, and Littlepaw was gone.

She tucked herself back into her nest, wanting to go back to sleep and dream about him again. But her mind kept racing with thoughts. Was it really possible for Littlepaw to already know these things? Was he watching from the top of ridge the whole time?

She shook her head to clear it, no longer wanting to think of such things. Littlepaw was her friend, not a spy. Scrambling to her paws, she stretched, flexed out her claws and yawned. She padded to entrance, the moss tendrils hanging lower now since it was Greenleaf.

Dawn peeked just above the horizon, casting long shadows across the clearing. The fresh-kill pile lay in the middle, piled high with mouth-watering prey. She licked her lips, suddenly realizing how hungry she was. She was so busy with Cinderpaw she had forgotten to eat yesterday. She padded to the heap, and nosed her way through them until she found a small vole. They were her favorite. She gripped it tightly, and brought it back the medicine den, her tail twitching excitedly.

"Once you're finished, could you go through the tansy? There's some leaves that are rotting and they will destroy the others if we don't pluck them out soon. You can toss them behind the den."meowed Yellowfang.

Surprised from her voice, Waterlily flinched and stared blankly at Yellowfang. She was busy eating her vole, she didn't hear her own mentor's pawsteps behind her. "Of course." Waterlily replied, finishing the last bit of vole and cleaned her paws furiously.

Waterlily made her to the herb store, the sharp, earthy scent of tansy filling her nostrils as she pushed the stems aside. Many of them were tinged with brown and smelled of rot. "Did you always want to be a medicine cat?" Waterlily asked innocently, Yellowfang now sitting beside her tearing away the darkened leaves.

She looked up, a stem still sticking to the side of her lips. "No." Yellowfang rasped, crouching lower to the ground, and nipping off

another.

"What happened?"

Yellowfang held her gaze, staring at her paws. She hesitated, trying not to tremble as she spoke, "There are some things that are left unknown."

Waterlily looked at her with confusion. Was it wrong to ask about the past? Or Yellowfang hiding something she doesn't want Waterlily to know?

Chapter Twenty One

Waterlily woke up to a piercing mew from outside the den. A patrol was heading into camp, and Fireheart held a tiny white kit in his jaws just a few tail-lengths ahead of them. *What did he do this time?* Waterlily thought. *Fireheart seems to get into a lot of trouble. It's a wonder he's still in this Clan.*

Bluestar came out from the leader's den, and looked down at them from the high rock. Her voice carried over them, "What is it this time?" Waterlily could sense a tinge of anger in her leader's mew. Was she fed up with the orange tom? She kept her ears pricked, eager to know what Bluestar would do. Fireheart dropped the tiny kit, it mewled loudly, screeching for his mother's milk.

"I found him near the twoleg dens again." growled Tigerclaw taking a step forward.

Bluestar blinked at Fireheart, "Is this true?"

The orange tom kneaded the ground anxiously, the kit still mewling between his paws. "I was with my sister, Princess. She had a litter of kits and wanted her first born to join ThunderClan." he explained.

Waterlily couldn't believe her eyes. He was bringing in another kittypet to the Clans? Didn't he know what the others thought about them? She could feel rage pulsing through her chest. She dug her claws into the ground, to keep herself steady as Bluestar went on.

"We don't need more kittypets." hissed Longtail, coming in from the side, his eyes narrowed.

"Silence." Hissed Bluestar, lashing her tail, "We have many mouths to feed already, Fireheart. I have accepted you many moons ago, alongside Waterlily. But we cannot bring in more."

"Please Bluestar. He is my kin." Fireheart pleaded.

That's entirely the problem. Waterlily hissed under her breath.

"If StarClan agrees, then he may stay." Bluestar said no more, and kept her gaze up at the blue sky, as if waiting for some sort of sign from StarClan. Not even a slight breeze drifted her way until she glanced back down at the orange tom and then at the small lump of fluff now hiding behind Fireheart. "Very well. It is apparent StarClan has agreed."

Waterlily sensed a wave of relief rush over Fireheart as he picked up the white kit again and headed for the nursery. Brindleface had recently lost two of her kits just a few days after they were born. Her milk was still full and plenty enough for one more beside the other two she had nestled beside her.

Waterlily padded back into the den, uninterested in the drama of another kittypet joining the Clans. She knew the queens would accept him. He was kit—they couldn't say no to something so helpless. But even with Graystripe's kits now in the Clan, it all could change. ThunderClan had the most mix of cats than any other. Waterlily doubted the other Clans would be so soft and bring in a kittypet.

She remembered the time she fell down the gorge and into the river which carried her far into RiverClan territory. They dragged her body out of the water, Mudfur had given her some herbs and they helped her find ThunderClan's leader. Perhaps the others were a lot like ThunderClan—just too proud to admit it.

"We'll need more moss." murmured Yellowfang. Waterlily already knew they needed moss. She'd seen the pile running low, which they kept in the back beside Cinderpaw's nest. "I can go get some now." she offered, since she wasn't doing anything productive. She headed out into the clearing and crossed over to the elder's den. Moss grew just above them near an old tree. She scrambled up the ravine, heaving herself up onto the ledge. She clawed her way up, digging deeper with every step.

Just ahead of her was the large oak tree. It was tall and girthy, towering over the others around it, and was covered with a layer of thick moss. She took a scoop of it with her paw, and draped it over

her back, then scooped more doing the same until she had enough moss to fill their den. She padded back, not caring if some of the tiny strings fell to the ground as she made her way down.

"Great. The elders need new bedding." ordered Yellowfang glancing up at Waterlily as she neared the entrance.

"You could have told me before I came back here." Waterlily hissed under her breath loud enough for the old she-cat to hear.

"You're young." Yellowfang hissed back with the same tone as hers.

Waterlily's eyes glinted with a sense of satisfaction. She admired her stubbornness, though she was grumpy most of them. Waterlily was still interested in her mentor's past, but she didn't dare press now. She padded to the Elder's den, fresh moss in her jaws.

She ducked under the brambles woven above the entrance. As soon as she got inside, the smell of must filled the air. The bedding stank more than a badger's den. She wrinkled her nose.

"Has the apprentices come by at all?" she asked, sitting down and wrapping her fluffy tail over her paws.

"They've been busy with prey." Croaked Dappletail, her amber eyes shown with pride.

"We've only a few apprentices this time around. More will come soon. It won't be long till Brindleface"s kits will be apprenticed." rasped Halftail, stepping out of his nest so Waterlily could change it easier. Dappletail was still weak in her legs; she had to do it in turns whenever the old tortoiseshell was able to lift apart of her body.

When she finished with them all, it was nearly sun high. Cinderpaw awoke from the medicine den and padded towards Waterlily, her injured foot just barely touching the ground. Waterlily turned when she heard the familiar hobble of the gray she-cat.

"You're doing well with Cinderpaw," mewed One-eye, glancing over at her, and watching with amusement.

"She is recovering well." replied Waterlily, a purr rumbling in her

throat. "She'll be back with Fireheart soon." she breathed with excitement. But also a hint of sadness still clung to the back of her mind. She would miss having the help of Cinderpaw. She would sweep away the herbs when they dried up or were too wilted to use, and tell funny stories about the dreams she had while they did the tedious work of tearing leaves and sorting them into separate piles.

Cinderpaw neared the Elders' den and stopped just a few tail-lengths from Waterlily. "Is there any training today?" she asked impatiently.

Waterlily shook her head. "I have much to do today. But if you would like, you can try walking around camp with your foot placed harder on the ground. You're lifting it too much as you walk." Waterlily pointed out. She brushed past her and headed back to the medicine den, leftover moss clinging to the side of her mouth.

"Do you really think I'll be ready tomorrow?" Cinderpaw called over her shoulder.

Waterlily looked down at her paws and shifted her weight unevenly. She wasn't *really* sure if Cinderpaw would be ready. It could still be several moons before Waterlily was completely sure of herself. But the apprentice could walk, and run if she needed to without any pain. She had to count it as some progress. "Yes," she finally mewed.

Chapter Twenty Two

The dawn patrol came running back into camp. Their voices were hostile with one another. Waterlily lifted her head and pricked her ears. Yellowfang did the same, her eyes round with curiosity.

"It's rabbit bones!" Tigerclaw shouted.

Yellowfang quickly got to her paws and bounded to the clearing. Fireheart, Whitestorm and Sandpaw were among them when Yellowfang neared. She took a slow whiff of the rabbit bones and wrinkled her nose in disgust, ruffling her fur. "Brokentail." she hissed.

"Are you sure?" Fireheart mewed, flicking his tail toward the blind leader lying across the camp.

"I was once the ShadowClan medicine cat." she replied with a sharp tone, then calmed herself as she continued, "I know the scent of ShadowClan. These were some of his friends. He's been planning something." She glanced over her shoulder shooting him a look.

Waterlily could feel a sense of hatred flooding from her mentor as she padded over to her to give the bones a sniff. She lowered her head and could only smell the fowl scent of ShadowClan. She didn't recognize the scent of anyone.

"What are we going to do?" growled Tigerclaw looking up at Bluestar who was standing on the high rock.

"Double the patrols. Have at least four warriors and an apprentice in each. Mark every part of our border. Make it clear we will not back down from a fight." she ordered, twitching the tip of her tail anxiously.

"What about Brokentail?" meowed Tigerclaw.

"He will be moved to the medicine den, where he will be watched."

Yellowfang let out a faint gasp, but showed no signs of disapproval as she looked up at Bluestar and dipped her head. Longtail and Darkstripe scurried over to the dark tabby tom and dragged him over to the medicine den entrance. "Where would you like him?" muffled Darkstripe as he bared his teeth deeper into the skin. Brokentail let out a yowl of pain, and tried kicking and thrashing his way free. Longtail gripped harder, and pinned him to the ground until he fell tired and limp.

"Just there," Waterlily pointed with her muzzle to the spot close to her nest. There, she could keep an eye on him, and he was far enough from the entrance, where he couldn't escape.

The two toms heaved him to the stone wall, and set him down a fox-length from Waterlily's place. Brokentail hissed, but kept his paws to himself as he laid down.

"What if he tries something again?" Tigerclaw prodded.

"I will decide when the time comes." Bluestar mewed, stepping down from the high rock. Waterlily could tell Tigerclaw wasn't satisfied with her answer. He kept still, his eyes narrowed to slits as he watched his leader disappear into her den. Waterlily glanced over the once ShadowClan leader. He was now blind and nearly deaf—nothing more than an elder.

"What are we going to do with Brokentail?" whispered Waterlily just before she turned to head to back to the medicine den.

Yellowfang was already a tail-length ahead of her and looked over her shoulder, "We do nothing."

"Nothing, but why?" Waterlily was confused. They had a fugitive living inside their camp who was capable of wiping out a whole Clan. How could they sit here and do nothing?

"What are we supposed to do?" she hissed, turning back and padding back to the medicine den.

Waterlily could feel her fur rise in anger and she bristled her neck and tail. The question swirled in her mind, but even she couldn't

answer it. What would they do with him? They couldn't torture him. They're medicine cats; they must treat all cats with respect no matter where they're from. Waterlily sighed, relaxed her fur, then followed her mentor inside.

"He will be watched at all times." Yellowfang rasped just before stepping into the den.

"What about when we go to the Gathering? Or the Moonstone? Would only one of us have to go then?" Waterlily blinked.

"Perhaps. Or we could have another Clan member."

"What about when we sleep?"

"Relax Waterlily. All will be fine. He will not escape. Besides, you're a light sleeper. You'd be able to hear him shuffle his claws."

Waterlily sighed, and silently agreed with a forced smile. Yellowfang sat by the fully stocked herb shelves. "Let's tear up some of this tansy. And then you can go fetch some daisies."

Yellowfang must have sensed her unease. *Sending me out of the den is probably for the better.* She told herself. She went to sit down by her mentor, and started to carefully tear apart the tansy, biting down hard and pulling with her claws.

Once they finished, Waterlily walked to the entrance and stopped, glancing back over her shoulder. "You'll be okay on your own?"

"Why wouldn't I?" Yellowfang looked up at her, filled with confusion. "I'm not some fragile old cat."

"I just meant, with—" she flicked her tail toward Brokenstar who was still lying in his nest as if he was bonded to the moss.

Yellowfang followed with her eyes, and gazed at him. At first her eyes narrowed to tiny slits, then they softened as she kept her eyes locked onto him. "He'll be fine. Now go."

Waterlily scampered to the clearing, though her thoughts still lingered onto Yellowfang and why she was being so weird about

Brokentail. Was she hiding something? Waterlily shook her head to clear it. She wouldn't hide something from the Clan she now belongs to, would she?